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"WHAT DO YOU WANT? AND WHY HAVE YOU DARED TO COME HERE?"

DID HE LOVE HER?

BY BARTLEY T. CAMPBELL.

CHAPTER I.

JOE AND MABEL.

THE bright afternoon sunlight was falling in a warm shower on the picturesque landscape, gilding the waters of the Youghiogeny with

touches of something much like gold, and lighting up the western windows of Ruloville, until they blazed red as glowing embers.

Ruloville was a plain, simple, unpretending village now, but in its youth it had had many ambitious aspirations; chief among which was to one day climb to the top of Sable Mountain, that from thence it might look down upon the smiling vale beneath, which was, during all the future years, it fondly imagined, to yield it golden cereals as tribute, receiving nothing in

return but the sweet music of Sabbath church bells, and occasional visits from the three old men, who had, in a very remote past, been commissioned to preach the Gospel among the mountains of Pennsylvania.

But, alas! for the mutability of all things earthly, Rulloville never attained the goal of its desires; for, when it had clambered up the mountain-side a short distance, it stopped to rest a bit, and take a whiff of fresh air; and ere it could get a new start, the old National Road—which stretched through its main street like a white belt—became deserted and silent! Then Rulloville heard with dismay that a railroad had been built forty miles to the northward; and that the locomotive had succeeded the jaded stage-horses; and that long trains of finely-finished cars had put a quietus on the lumbering Conestoga wagons forever.

No one was willing to believe the story at first; but, when days, and weeks, and months passed and the old white-covered wagons rumbled through the town no more, the smithy took in his sign of the three crimson horse-shoes; then two of the three hotels put up their shutters, and permitted the grass to grow green and rank before their doors; and finally, many of the young men wearied of the monotony of the town, and packing up their worldly goods, journeyed westward, leaving Rulloville asleep in its own wrinkles, to doze the years away and dream of its past greatness.

Adam Dormer, the miller, had, at one time, thought of joining those westward bound; but his good wife Jane, who had been born in Rulloville, shook her head, and quoted something about a rolling stone and its negative qualities, and at last, with a shower of tears washed away every inclination Adam ever entertained for the Far West.

He went resolutely to work, however, and repaired the mill; built a new race, lengthened the dam, and gave all his attention to grinding the grain of the neighborhood. He managed to get a good deal, too, through his hands every day, and what with his percentages, and the ready cash he earned, he was soon able to build a neat stone house, of five rooms, on the hill-side, just above the mill.

He was not burdened with a large family, for out of four children born to him, two boys and a girl were lying under the shadow of the little Gothic chapel, their graves covered with blush-roses and long, tangled skeins of grass, flecked, here and there, with marigolds which had been planted years ago by the fingers of kindly, patient Jane Dormer, but which had been watered and tended by little Joe Dormer, the miller's only son, for many a year.

One snowy winter night, a few weeks after little Nettie Dormer died, a young and handsome woman, bearing in her arms a baby girl, came to the miller's door, and asked permission to remain over night. She said her name was Mabel Lynn, and that she was going to Cumberland, Maryland, to join her husband.

Of course she was permitted to remain, and after a warm supper, retired to bed. The baby cried during the night, and Jane Dormer got up and took it down-stairs.

"You needn't stir, madam," said Jane, addressing the young mother. "I'm used to babies, and I like them so. I'd never tire of a dear 'little, coosey, oosey, yike this 'ittle dear."

Jane kissed the pink mouth, all puckered up like a purse; pinched the round, fat cheeks, and put her finger playfully in the scarlet dimple of the baby's chin. Then she remembered little Nettie had a dimple just like that, and, while she toasted baby's toes before the great wood fire, the tears streamed silently down her brown cheeks, and crept into the corners of her twitching mouth.

The strange young woman's baby, all unconscious of the numb pain that was at Jane Dormer's heart, drank of the warm whey freely, and then doubling up its little fat fists, nestled close to Jane's breast, and went fast asleep.

After a while, the miller's wife took the child back to its mother, and receiving the latter's thanks, went off to bed again, feeling very sad and disconsolate as she did so.

But the next morning brought a surprise to the Dormer household, such as it had not experienced for a good many years—the stranger had disappeared—had tramped away in the snow-drifts during the night, leaving her baby girl behind. There was a note pinned on its breast, saying that its mother was not able to support the tiny waif, and that, having witnessed Jane Dormer's tenderness, she felt that she could not intrust her unhappy offspring to better hands.

"Be kind to my precious darling, and, some day, I will come back and reward you well. Good-by! Kiss my pet night and morning, for its poor, half-crazed mother, and—God bless you all!"

This was the concluding sentence, and when Adam Dormer had read it through, and through again, he turned to his wife and said:

"This is a very strange affair, Jane, and I can't see why she pitched on us. Seems to me there is people in Rulloville better able to provide for a strange child than we are."

"I'd like to keep it, Adam."

"Keep it!" he repeated, opening his eyes wide. "We ain't rich enough to start an orphan asylum yet, Jane."

"No, not an asylum," she answered; "just this little one, Adam; we won't miss what she'll need, and if we do, why—"

"Why—what?"

"She'll help fill the place of little Nettie."

The woman's voice was thick as she spoke, and her eyes were swimming in tears.

Adam Dormer pressed his wife's hand, and said:

"All right; just as you say."

That settled the matter, and on the next Sunday afternoon the waif was carried up to the chapel and baptized.

Jane wanted it named after her lost child, but Adam said:

"No; we'll not give her a name she has no right to at all. We'll just call her what her mother was called—Mabel Lynn."

Thirteen years have passed away since then, and Mabel has grown to be a beautiful child.

As she stands there by the mill-race, watching the great, round wheel, as it thunders among the waters, with the whirr of the mill in her ears, and the glare of the sunset in her face, she looks very pretty and graceful.

Below her, at the river's brink, sits Joe Dor-

mer, now a lad of sixteen. He looks a good deal the miller—brown and strong, with hazel eyes and a superabundance of black hair. His clothes, unlike the girl's, are ragged in many places, and his bare feet, now half-covered in the stream, are hacked and hard from exposure.

Although Joe was fishing, he was not giving piscatorial matters his whole attention, for, every now and then he would dart a furtive glance at Mabel, and finally he stood up and cried out:

"Come on down here, Mabel."

"Where?" the girl asked, bending over to look down the steep bank.

"Right down here," he answered. "You needn't be afraid. Give me your hand."

She gave him her hand without the slightest hesitancy, for she placed great faith in Joe's judgment, and he helped her down the hill, and made her a seat close to the water's edge.

Then he displayed, with pardonable pride, his finny prizes, and she clapped her hands with delight, as she watched the wee, blackish pikes and larger trout wriggle through the shallow pound in which their captor had placed them.

Joe's father called him to help unload some grain, and the boy, ere he bounded off, admonished the girl to sit very still on the boulder he had placed for her, and not to go nearer the water on any consideration.

She promised to obey, but soon forgot the warning, when she saw Joe's line disappearing in the waters of the river.

A huge fish was tugging at the bait, and dragging her foster-brother's fishing appurtenances.

Mabel wrung her hands hopelessly at first, and cried out:

"Joe! Joe! Oh, Joe! Your fishin' things are goin'!"

But, as Joe did not answer, the girl herself leaped forward, and tried to catch the rod which was now afloat. She failed, and before she could recover her balance, toppled headlong into the river.

A wild shriek went up, as she felt the cold waters embrace her, and then the rush and buzz of something in her ears, and a strangling sensation followed.

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH.

JOE was heaping up sacks of wheat on the white floor of the mill, when he heard that shriek from Mabel's lips, and his heart stood still with fear.

"Tis Mabel," father, he exclaimed. "She's felt in the river."

Then he dashed out of the mill and over the bank in a twinkling.

The eyes of the poor boy ached when he saw that the shore was empty, then he uttered a glad cry. He had caught sight of Mabel's dress floating with the current, and with that recklessness which was a part of Joe's nature, he leaped into the water, and made for the drowning child.

A few strokes, and he caught the flimsy texture in his grasp, only to have it come with him. Then the struggling girl began to sink, limp

and almost lifeless, to the bottom of the dark river.

With one desperate effort the boy clutched her by the arm; then his hand caught in the meshes of her hair, and he lifted her face above the water. He tried to swim now, but the burden was too great for him, and, faint and exhausted, he, too, was sinking. To let go his hold, and save himself, would have been easily done; but Joe could not do such a cowardly thing, even to save his own life; and so, when he realized, as he did very keenly, that Mabel must die, he determined to die with her.

Down! down into the green depths they sunk, until Joe's feet touched the slimy rocks; then setting his teeth close together, he made a fierce plunge upward, and then—they were saved.

Adam Dormer, who had run after his brave boy, as fast as his legs would carry him, arrived just in time to grab him by the collar of his coat, and pull him up on the grassy bank.

Joe was very weak and faintish when he touched the shore, but not too faint or weak to exclaim, "Father, is Mabel livin'?—is she gone?"

"No, Joe, I think she's here yet," replied Adam. "Yes, her heart's a-beatin', and her little breast is warm. Thank God! Joe, that yer both came out right side up."

Joe was very thankful, even after he saw that Mabel was still unconscious, and that her arm showed, in black and purple, where he had held her.

Mabel Lynn was very sick for many days; so sick, indeed, that for fully twelve hours Dr. Kingsley could not tell whether or not she would escape death.

Joe watched by her bedside all the time, sometimes holding her feverish hands in his cool palms, and sometimes smoothing back the hair from her burning forehead.

"You are so good, Joe," she said, one day, when the period of convalescence had come about; "on'y for you bein' so good, Joe, I wouldn't cared if I *did* die, an' go to Heaven, where my real mamma is."

"How do ye know yer mother's dead?" asked the boy, ignoring the compliment altogether.

"Oh, of course she's dead," replied Mabel; "'cause if she wasn't, ye see, she wouldn't stay away so long."

"Does seem so," said Joe, after a pause, and then there was nothing more said about Mabel's real mother.

Singularly enough, on the following day, Adam received a letter from the strange woman.

He had never got a scratch of a pen from her before—nothing in all those long years, and this was but a mere line. It ran thus:

You have been very kind and good, and I will reward you well. Inclosed please find check. I want the girl educated like a lady. MABEL LYNN.

A bright, pink check fluttered to the floor, as the old man read, and Mrs. Dormer hastily picked it up.

It was drawn on the Atlantic Bank, New York, in favor of Adam Dormer, and called for five hundred dollars.

The miller gaped with wonder, and read it aloud, and then, quite overcome, he sat down, and looking up at his smiling wife, said;

"Well, Janè, what do ye think of that—eh? What on earth do you think of that?"

The poor woman could not tell what she thought of it; it had completely upset her thinking faculties, and finally she asked:

"What are you goin' to do with the money?"

"Well, it comes kinder handy," he said, wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"What, to fix the house with?" asked Jane.

"No, not to fix no house with," he replied, a little sternly. "I wouldn't touch a cent of that money for my own use, for nothing in the world. It's Mabel's money, an' she'll have the benefit of every red cent of it."

"But she can't spend it," put in the miller's wife.

"No; but I can for her. She must go to school now, and learn something more than we've been able to teach her."

It was arranged within the next fortnight that Mabel was to go to a boarding-school at Crystal Springs, twenty-five miles distant, and that Joe and Adam were to accompany her there in a covered wagon.

After days full of busy preparation, and some tears, and much heartache, Mabel was declared ready; the old wagon rolled around to the door, and then the parting between Jane Dormer and Mabel followed.

"Don't forget old Rulloville, darling," said Jane, with a gush of tears; "an' don't forget them that you leave behind, and who'll always pray for you, day and night."

The child wound her arms about the woman's neck, and cried as if her heart was breaking.

Another good-by hug, and Adam lifted Mabel into the vehicle; then, jumping in himself, he cracked his whip, coughed down his sobs, and drove off.

The boys of Rulloville cheered the wagon until it crossed the bridge, and Mabel waved her blue gingham bonnet back at them, until a turn in the road hid the town from sight.

Then she coiled herself into Joe's arms, and wept a little, and finally fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

HOME-SICK.

WHEN the wagon reached Crystal Springs, it was late in the day, and the melancholy twilight which hedged the place about made Mabel feel inexpressibly sad and home-sick; and this feeling was heightened not a little, when a crowd of girls, at play on the lawn in front of Crystal Springs Institute, giggled and pointed at her as she passed.

"She's got boy's shoes on," cried one of the group, "and look at her funny bonnet."

She looked up into Joe's face, and young as she was, noted how red it had grown, and how his eyes glared at the insult.

Forgetting her own pain, she slipped her hand into Joe's, and said, quietly: "I don't care for them a bit."

The next morning Mabel was examined by the lady principal and assigned a place in one of the new classes.

For the most part the girls treated the shabby little stranger coldly, and, when recess came, they left her standing on the lawn all alone, and began their romps and games.

"Why don't you play, too?"

The voice was sweet and kind, and Mabel looked up into Alice Houston's face.

"Because—" she said dropping her eyes.

"Because—what?"

"They make fun of my dress." There was something very bitter in Mabel's voice, as she said this, and Alice noticed it at once.

"And you are angry—are you?"

There was no answer. Then Alice spoke again.

"Will you come with me for a walk?"

"Yes," gladly.

They strolled along the lawn until they were almost out of sight of the other girls. Then Alice, who was a dark, beautiful girl of fifteen, said: "My name is Alice Houston; my parents live in New York, close to the Hudson. Where do yours live?"

"In Rulloville," was the reply. "My name is Mabel Lynn, and my father's name is Adam Dormer."

"Your father's name is Dormer, and yours is Lynn!" exclaimed Alice. "Why, how do you make that out?"

"He is not my real father"

"Not your real father?"

"No."

"And who is?"

"I don't know. I was left by my mother at Dormer's when I was a baby."

Alice opened her large, lustrous black eyes wide, and lifted her jeweled hands in wonder.

"And you never have seen your father or mother?"

"No, I never did."

"And you have no home?"

"Oh, yes; I have a nice home, and they are both good to me," said Mabel. "Besides, there is Joe, and he likes me just the same as a brother."

"How old is Joe?"

"Joe's sixteen past."

"Is he a big boy?"

"Most a man. But, Joe's so good; he never acts like a man—he's just a boy."

"Do you think I would like Joe?"

"Oh, ever so much!" exclaimed Mabel, with enthusiasm. "But he don't wear such nice clothes, like some boys," she added.

"I don't care about clothes," replied Alice.

"Do you think he would like me?"

"I am sure he would!" was the prompt reply.

"Then, maybe, when he comes to see you, I will fall in love with him, and make him fall in love with me?"

Alice laughed as she said this, showing her even teeth of pearl as she did so, and nudged Mabel with her elbow playfully.

Mabel was about to say that she wished such an event possible, but, all at once, the thought flashed in her mind—"What would I do for somebody to love, and somebody to love me, if Joe loves somebody else?" And so she hung down her head and said nothing.

Alice divined what was passing in her companion's mind, and smilingly—for Alice was all smiles and caresses—said:

"You are jealous now. You needn't blush and try to scorch the grass with your crimson face. I see it, you see! But, come, let us be friends. I have a lover, too—a handsome, nice

fellow. I get letters from him every week or two; he's in Europe now."

"Across the sea?" asked Mabel, with some interest.

"Yes; across the sea—in England. He's coming home soon, though, and when he does, I'm going to have a long vacation."

"What's his name?" asked simple little Mabel.

"It ain't such a nice name," replied Alice. "Just John—plain John Nevin. He's my cousin, though, and papa says I'm going to be his wife in three more years."

Mabel thought that would be so nice, and she said so, in her own frank way, and then listened with breathless interest to Alice's glowing description of her splendid home on the far-off Hudson.

After that afternoon these two girls became fast friends, and every succeeding evening during the season they spent together, talking and chatting about themselves, and their homes, and their boy-lovers.

Two days before the annual commencement Alice received a letter from her father, saying that her mother and himself would be in Crystal Springs on the following day, to take her home.

Alice promptly communicated the glad intelligence to Mabel, and it was arranged that the two girls should meet the visitors at the pike gate, and so they did.

Captain Houston was a tall, silver-haired man, with large, blue eyes, and military bearing. He was, possibly, forty, but looked much older, while his wife was a dark beauty, five years his junior.

They folded their only child in their arms, and kissed her tenderly; then Mrs. Houston asked Alice who her companion was, and the latter replied:

"This is Mabel, my favorite among all the girls."

"What did you say her name is?" and Mrs. Houston put the tips of her yellow kid gloves on Mabel's head as she spoke.

"Mabel Lynn," was the reply.

Captain Houston was leisurely surveying the Institute through his glasses when that name sounded in his ears, but, all at once he became deadly pale. He darted a quick, sharp glance at Mabel, who was talking now to the stately, lady-like Mrs. Houston, and then he said, in a voice which he could scarce keep from trembling:

"My child, where is your mother—where do you live?"

"At Ruloville," the child answered. "She will be here to-morrow."

"Your mother will be here to-morrow!" he gasped. "Are you sure of that?"

"Yes, sir. Papa Dormer and Joe are coming, too."

He passed his hand under Mabel's chin, held up her face, and looked down into the blue depths of her eyes.

A tender light came into his face as he gazed, and for the nonce, his other hand, which lay upon her curls, trembled like an aspen.

"You are a pretty little girl, Mabel Lynn"—he dwelt upon her name—"and you must come and see us sometime. Won't you?"

Perhaps she would; she would like to go and see New York and the Hudson so well! But she couldn't go this year, because she wanted to go back to Ruloville so bad.

Alice volunteered the story of Mabel's youth, as the party walked up to the Institute, and Mrs. Houston said, at the conclusion:

"It's such a pity; left among strangers, with nobody to take care of her, or see that she is properly trained."

By this time they had reached the reception room of the Institute, and Madam Wayne, all smiles and flounces, came forward to greet her patrons.

CHAPTER IV.

AT CRYSTAL SPRINGS.

THE Dormers came to the Springs early on the following day, and Mabel met them in the crowded hall. The meeting was full of joy and warmth of feeling and it never occurred to Mabel that Adam's boots were patched, and that they made a great noise as he stamped about; or that Jane Dormer was the shabbiest-dressed lady among them all. And she also failed to notice that Joe had a new jean suit, in which he looked very stiff and awkward.

But, many of the visitors did notice all this, and some smiled, and some stared, and some wondered where those odd-looking creatures had come from.

Joe's quick eye caught the full import of this giggling, and staring, and wonderment, and after a while he strolled off into the village of Crystal Springs, in order to get rid of the hard feelings it caused him.

When he returned, the commencement exercises were over, and the visitors were leaving the Institute in crowds.

He met Mabel and his parents on the lawn.

"Where did you run off to, Joe?" asked the girl. "I looked everywhere for you."

"I didn't like to have them folks making fun of me, and so I went away."

"Make fun of you!" exclaimed Adam. "What on earth would they make fun of you for?"

Mabel looked up and down at Joe's jean suit; but she didn't smile like the rest. She knew what it was to be made fun of, and she said: "I wouldn't mind them, if I were you. They used to make fun of me, too."

"But, I can't help but mind them," said Joe, gulping down his mortification; "and I hate rich people—they are always making fun of folks that are poor."

The miller and his wife were astonished at this, but, before they could say a word, the Houstons came out; Alice kissed Mabel, shook Joe's hand, and that same evening departed with her parents for New York.

Mabel was very glad to get back to Ruloville, and was very sorry when the time came for her to return to school. She had passed the eight weeks of vacation in wandering through the woods with Joe, in listening to his plans for the future, and to his brilliant expectations.

"I am not going to be buried up here forever," he said, one evening, as they stood by the old mill together. "I'm going to California or Australia some of these days. I'm going to

make money, and be rich and proud like other people."

"But what will mother do, and papa, when you go away?"

"Must get along without, I guess. No use in me staying here, anyway," he said, determinedly. "I'm no use."

"But then, Joe, we would be so lonesome."

"Yes, I know; and so would I; but, such things can't be helped. Almost all the young men go away from Ruloville to get a raise. They know there's nothing to be got staying here."

Young as the girl was, she saw the force of Joe's words, and said, after a pause:

"You know what's best, I guess, though I wish you wasn't going away."

They talked a long while about Joe's projected pilgrimage in search of Dame Fortune's shrine, and even after Mabel went back to Crystal Springs, she could not forget the boy's earnestness and purpose.

Before vacation came about again, Mabel was summoned home to attend the deathbed of her foster-mother.

Poor Jane did not last long; the fever did its work rapidly, and, on the fifth day of her illness as Joe and Mabel were walking home from the mill in the sunset, Adam met them with streaming eyes, and said:

"'Tis all over now. She's gone from us forever."

"What, mother?" exclaimed Joe.

"Yes; you have no mother at all now, nor I haven't any wife."

Jane Dormer was carried up the side of Sable Mountain and buried with her children.

Three months after Jane's death, and Mabel's return to school, Captain Houston wrote the miller a long letter, asking him to permit Mabel to spend her vacation with them.

They were going to the White Mountains, he wrote, and Alice was so anxious to have Mabel with them.

Now, Adam Dormer had been looking forward to Mabel's return with a yearning fondness, and to deny himself the pleasure of seeing her soon was a severe hardship. But then he thought—"Why should she come here to see an old stupid fellow like me, when she's got such a chance to see the world? No, I won't refuse; the trip will do her good."

It vexed Joe terribly when he heard that Mabel was not coming home, but quickened a purpose that had grown somewhat dormant, and he said to his father:

"If the Houstons will take care of Mabel for a few years, why, let them, and you and I will sell out the mill here, and go to California."

"Go to California, Joe? What put that in your head?"

"It's been in my head a good while, and I'm going to carry it out too. Why should we live here all alone, with nothing but our mere clothes and board, while everybody is going away to make fortunes?"

Adam did not take to the scheme with any degree of enthusiasm; he would prefer remaining in Ruloville; but, as Joe had set his heart on the West, and would doubtless go alone, the miller consented on one condition—that Captain Houston would take care of Mabel.

Between Joe and Adam, a letter was written to the captain explanatory of their designs and desires.

A week passed, and then an answer came, saying that Captain Houston would be glad to have Mabel make her home with them; that she should be treated as one of the family, and that the captain would be in Ruloville on the first of July to take Mabel away.

Adam was both glad and sorry when this letter came; glad that Mabel would have a good home, and sorry that nothing promised to interfere with his migration.

But, finally, the first of July came, and with it came Captain Houston, Alice, and Mabel.

A little supper was prepared for the newcomers, and when they were all seated around the board, Adam said: "We haven't much that is very inviting; not what we'd like to have, nor what we'd had, sure, if poor Jane was a-livin'; but what we have you're welcome to with a hearty good will. This is the last meal which we will all eat together"—and here he looked over at Mabel, whose eyes were beginning to fill with tears—"for many a year," he continued, "and mebbe it's the last we'll ever eat together—ever in this world. But all I've got to say is, that Mabel's been a good girl—a mighty good girl—and I'll say, what I never said before, that I love her just the same as if she was my own flesh and blood, and God knows how this parting hour makes my heart ache."

Mabel burst into tears now, and so did Joe and Alice: and when they left the table, which they did a few minutes after, scarce a thing upon it had been touched.

Joe suggested going down and taking a last look at the mill, and they did so.

When they were about returning to the house, he whispered to Mabel:

"Don't forget to answer my letters when I write, and try and don't forget poor old Joe altogether."

She pressed his brown hand, and, in a husky voice, answered:

"No, Joe Dormer; I never shall."

As the twilight crept up the rugged steep of Sable Mountain, the glittering brougham rattled off toward Crystal Springs, and Joe and Adam Dormer stood in the roadway watching it out of sight.

CHAPTER V.

JOHN NEVIN.

A JUNE sun is setting, round and red, behind the Highlands of the Hudson, and the mighty river, with its majestic sweep, is wrapt in somber shadows, only the highest cliffs catching the reflected radiance of the bright-hued clouds which drift everywhere, from horizon to zenith, like crimson and gold fantasies through a land of enchantment.

Oak Manor, standing as it does on one of the highest knobs, still basks in the light, and Alice Houston and Mabel Lynn are walking up and down the broad piazza, arm in arm.

Two years have passed since Mabel first came to Oak Manor, and these two years have done much for her. She has grown round and plump, and, perhaps, three inches taller, giving her form a lithe, though womanly appearance; and,

while Alice is dark and radiantly beautiful, Mabel is all tenderness and sweetness. Her hair is possibly a darker shade of gold, but it is gold still, fine, flossy gold, such as peris might have tucked up with crystal combs in Oriental caves, ere Tom Moore's poesy made known their beauty to the world.

They are talking now of their projected trip to Newport, and planning little excursions among the Highlands, after they come home.

"You have never seen the sea, Mabel?" exclaimed Alice; "but when you do, you will just go wild over it. The white sandy beach, and the great green waves. Oh, it is so beautiful."

"But not half so beautiful as Mabel's self," said a voice close behind the girls, and turning, they met the gaze of Captain Houston. By his side stood a gentleman of thirty-three, or thereabouts. An exceedingly stylish and handsome man he was, although his face was burned with tropic suns, and there was a certain air about him that had a tendency to make him look grave, or sad, or both.

"Alice, can you guess who this is?" asked the captain.

"No, sir," darting a quick glance upward, and then dropping her eyes again, her face suffused with blushes.

"This, then, is John Nevin," said the captain, with a chuckle, and evidently enjoying his daughter's embarrassment.

She was about to rush to his arms, but when she looked up into his earnest eyes, she restrained herself, and said, simply:

"Cousin John, you are welcome to Oak Manor."

They shook hands; but, notwithstanding, the reception was a little cool, when it is remembered that these two were betrothed to each other. But John Nevin did not seem to expect anything more, and he simply said in return:

"Thank you! I'll try and deserve your welcome."

Mabel was then introduced by Captain Houston to the stranger, and the latter, after looking at her for a moment, said, in his usual grave way:

"Miss Lynn, I have surely seen you somewhere before, or at least, somebody who resembles you a great deal. Ah, yes! I remember now; you are the very image of a dear friend whom I met and was intimate with in Europe—Laura Robsart. Did you ever know a lady of that name?"

"No; I never knew a lady of that name," answered Mabel, smiling a little.

John Nevin did not smile in return, but bit his lip, and muttered to himself: "How like she is to Laura—how *very* like!"

Then he proposed a stroll in the grove; the girls accepted, and for the next hour John Nevin regaled them with his European experiences.

His voice was deep and earnest, and though it was but of the most trivial matter he spoke, the calm dignity of his words made his auditors all attention.

"It was at Rheims I first met Laura Robsart," he said, "whom I have already spoken of as the counterpart of Miss Mabel here. We traveled in the same diligence for thirty miles, and when we reached the village of Eyfert, her

father-in-law, who was her sole traveling companion, became very ill—in fact, I thought he would die ere we reached the inn."

"It was an awkward position for a lady," remarked Alice; "alone, and in a strange country, with a dying man."

"Yes, very awkward, and Miss Robsart realized this keenly," he replied. "But, then, Laura was not a weakish woman, nor one easily frightened or nonplussed, so she at once asked my assistance to help the invalid from the creaking old vehicle to the inn, and when I had done so, she said: 'You being an American, as we are, I am emboldened to ask you if you would please secure us seats in the diligence that leaves tomorrow for Cologne. We intend to rest there until my father-in-law recovers sufficiently to travel further.'"

"Did you do so?" asked Mabel, interested in the story.

"Of course I did. Men are not apt to disoblige beautiful women, Miss Lynn, especially when they are not seriously inconvenienced by the performance of the gallantry, and Laura was beautiful—very, very beautiful, indeed."

Mabel blushed as he said this, remembering what he had said of a resemblance between her and Laura; and Alice, coloring slightly, asked:

"Was she a widow?"

"Yes. I afterward learned from her own lips that her husband died in California, in 1853."

"Did her father-in-law die abroad?" questioned Alice.

"No; I went with them to Cologne, and remained there for three months. On several occasions he was on the brink of the grave, but by tender nursing, on the part of Laura, he was brought through; and two years ago, when I parted with them at Antwerp, he was as sound physically as I am to-day."

When the trio returned to the house, the lamps were lit in the grand saloon.

"Play something for us, Alice, will you?" asked John Nevin; "and you, Miss Mabel, sing. I know you can sing."

Alice played, with dashing vivaciousness of manner, a sprightly air; then the accompaniment to a song of welcome, which Mabel sung with fervor and brilliancy, and when the music ceased, John Nevin thanked his entertainers, and by request sung an old, quaint, dreary German song himself.

The lamps were burning low and the moonlight was streaming in through the half-open windows, and falling in light, fantastic shapes on the velvet carpet, when the two girls bid John good-night, and tripped up-stairs to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

LAURA, THE BEAUTIFUL.

THE Ocean House, Newport, was thronged with guests, and the brilliant ball-room was aglow with beauty. Bright eyes and diamonds sparkled in rivalry, and the giddy dancers floated around the glittering room to the sweet, voluptuous strains of Offenbach, or sauntered out on the colonnades, or to the beach, under the star-lit sky.

Mabel and Alice were delighted. It was

their first night at Newport, and they stood by one of the windows, and watched the dancers, while John Nevin pointed out the celebrities to them. Mabel could scarce restrain herself from giving expression to her wonderment and pleasure.

"Who is that lady there, Ansen?" asked a young man addressing another who stood close to John.

"Which one?"

"That one there, standing at the opposite window, in blue silk, with the yellowish hair in such abundance."

"Oh, that's a new arrival; just got here to-day—a widow. Stylish, ain't she?"

"Very. What's her name?"

"I heard it, but can't remember now. Sounds something like Roberts, but it ain't that."

John Nevin glanced carelessly in the direction pointed out by the speaker; then an exclamation of delight escaped him. "That's she!" he said, turning to his companions—"that's Laura—Mrs. Robsart, I mean."

Alice's black eyes sought out the fair face, and devoured it for an instant; then her heart sunk, and she said:

"She is very lovely."

Just then, Captain Houston came up with the son of an old friend, an artist, George Dalby, and after the introductions had been got through with, John Nevin excused himself, and went off in quest of Laura Robsart.

Mr. Dalby was agreeable, full of compliments and pretty sayings, and he at once endeavored to interest Alice and Mabel, in the gossip of the place; but, although the former smiled often, her eyes were wandering everywhere in search of that cold, silent man—John Nevin—whom she was every day learning to love more passionately.

"Will the ladies take a stroll in the open air?" asked Mr. Dalby. "The moon is rising, now, and the beach will be thronged directly."

"Yes," said Mabel, noticing Alice's abstraction, "let us go."

Grandly the moon arose out of the Atlantic's vast wilderness of waters, lighting up the shore, and painting a sheeny path of silver on the waves.

Crowds of people, now, were strolling up and down the beach, or standing in knots upon the white sand.

Mr. Dalby knew a great many; he had been a regular visitor at Newport for five consecutive seasons, and, as he walked along, he entertained the girls with stories of gayety and love-making, some of which he had only heard, but a great many of which he knew either one or both of the parties concerned.

"Do you see that tall gentleman, there, with the lightish suit, talking to the lady in mourning?" he asked.

Yes, they saw him distinctly.

"Well, you could scarcely believe it; but that man left his wife and two children in London, to follow a young widow, with whom he became infatuated while spending a season at Bath."

"Indeed!" said Mabel, shocked at the revelation. "But what brought him to America?"

"She, of course! She is an American, and he followed her."

"She must be a very wicked woman," said Alice.

"On the contrary, she has the reputation of being a very kind lady. It wasn't her fault. She did not ask his admiration or love. He simply fell; wasn't knocked down."

"What brought him to Newport?"

It was Mabel who spoke, with her eyes riveted on the strange man.

"Why, she came here, and he must needs follow her, as if she were an *ignis fatuus*."

"Is that her in black, talking to him now?" asked Alice.

"Oh, no, bless your soul! She don't speak to him at all," answered the artist. "'Tis said she begged of him to return to his family, when she first met him here, and on his refusal she bid him never recognize her again."

A woman's laugh—rippling, silvery, joyous, sounded close behind our friends, and then George Dalby whispered:

"That's the lady, now—the beautiful widow."

The two girls glanced to the right, from whence the peal of laughter had come, and there, in the moonlight, they saw Laura Robsart leaning on the arm of John Nevin!

She was looking up into his face, and the moonbeams fell full upon hers, making it look white as marble, and rarely beautiful indeed. Her golden hair fell in waves upon her shoulders, screened now from the falling dew by a heavy shawl of genuine thread lace, and at her white rounded throat a great diamond burned like a coal of fire.

John Nevin was talking to her in a low, subdued voice—so low that none heard him, save herself, and she answered with occasional merry bursts of laughter.

They passed close to Dalby and his companions, but so rapt up were they in each other, that, although Alice could have laid her hand on John Nevin's arm, he did not recognize her.

They walked on and on, until the amber mist, which was beginning to curtain in the scene, hid them from view, and close behind them, like a gray shadow of despair, walked the man whose wife and children waited for him beyond the ocean.

When Mabel saw John Nevin with Laura Robsart, whom she now regarded as a dangerous woman, she felt her indignation rising against him.

Why should he have come back to awaken a love in Alice Houston's simple, girlish heart, when he was so completely in the meshes of this woman; and why had he not the courage to ask a release from an engagement made so many years ago, that it could not be considered binding on either? "He must be either a weak or a wicked man," she muttered to herself.

These thoughts flashed through her brain in an instant, and then, noticing how very white and ghostly Alice was, she said: "Let's go back to the hotel. It's getting chilly."

"The dew is very heavy," remarked Dalby.

"Are you cold, Miss Alice?"

She was all of a shiver now, and she shut her teeth firmly together to prevent them from chattering.

"Yes, very cold. Let's go back."

She thanked George Dalby when he folded

her wrap close about her, and then, casting a lingering, yearning look in the direction John Nevin had disappeared, she took the young artist's arm, and they began to retrace their steps.

CHAPTER VII.

ROCKLEDGE.

ELTON ROBSART occupied the handsomest cottage at Newport. It stood on a ledge of rocks about a mile from the Ocean House, and overlooked the sea. It was called Rockledge, and was splendidly furnished throughout; the floors covered with velvet and rich Brussels, and the windows draped in finest tapestry, even to the floors. There was a wide colonnade in front, up the snowy columns of which dark vines clambered, and hung in festoons from the eaves, dotted here and there with red berries, which looked very much, when ripe, like drops of blood. In the large airy drawing-room sat Elton Robsart, reading Goldsmith's "Animated Nature." He was apparently sixty years old, although he might have been younger by half a decade. Starting out in life with a handsome face, form and fortune, he had led a wild, reckless, voluptuous life, until at forty he found himself a mere wreck, both morally and physically. His wife, whom he married shortly after reaching his majority, bore him but one child, and then, being a weak woman, folded her hands meekly over her breast, and drifted into eternity. Her memory, and his son Cleve, were all he had to live for, and these he either thought too insignificant to influence him, or else—and this is altogether the most likely—he never thought of them at all, until he returned from a ten years' jaunt through Europe, to find Cleve a young man of twenty, and himself a decrepit, worn-out *roue*, not far from forty.

This awakened him to a sense of his situation, and he set about educating his boy after his own peculiar ideas, and to building up his shattered constitution by a free use of drugs and exercise. He took too much of both, and became an invalid, and Cleve, whose moral training amounted to nothing, grew tired of the old gentleman's exactions and ran off to the West.

This affected old Elton seriously; he believed his son was ungrateful and hard-hearted, and in his fury he burned the three letters Cleve sent him. He knew from the postmarks they were from the West, but that was all. A few years of silence between him and his wayward child caused him to relent, and when he was thinking about advertising for the absentee, in the western papers, a young woman wrote to him from Baltimore, saying that she was the widow of Cleve Robsart, and that the latter had died in the mines of California.

He telegraphed for her to come to him at once, and the next day the steamer bound for Norfolk landed her within a hundred yards of Robsart Place.

The old man questioned her about his son closely, but she answered him frankly, and with a candor that disarmed suspicion. She described Cleve minutely, and bore on her index finger a

large gold band which she said was her wedding ring.

"You shall have a home with me here as long as I live," he said, at length, "and when I die, Robsart Place shall be yours."

This was how it came about that Laura Robsart became mistress of vast wealth and greater expectations.

She did not let her good fortune turn her brain, though, and night and day she thought of nothing else but of devising means to add to the old man's comfort, and it was partly owing to her care, and partly to his own taste, that he always looked so neat and clean—just as if he lived in a satin-lined bandbox.

On the morning of this introduction to the reader, he was robed in glossless cashmere, with white and gold slippers on his feet, and a pink silk smoking-cap upon his head.

The white neckcloth gave him a clerical look, which his sensuous face partially belied, and the hand that grasped the volume he read trembled nervously. He was becoming tired of Goldsmith, when Laura Robsart, all pink and white, stole into the room, and creeping up behind him, surprised him with a kiss.

"Ah! sunbeam," he said, with a smile, "you are late getting down this morning."

"Yes—a little late. Did you miss me?"

He did not notice that she was angling for a compliment, and said, at once:

"Yes, I missed you this morning, and I missed you last night. You were out late on the beach—weren't you?"

"I was home at ten."

"Who was with you?" He was patting her white arm—so much like ivory—that lay upon his knee.

"John Nevin."

"Indeed! I thought he was in Europe."

The old gentleman's brow was clouding. He was jealous of John Nevin, and he feared Laura would not always prove faithful to the memory of his son. But she saw through him at once; had he been made of glass he could not have been more transparent to that woman who knelt at his feet, and looked up, like an innocent child, into his face.

"He came back a month ago," she answered.

"He is coming over this evening to see you."

"I don't want to see him," he exclaimed, petulantly. "He must not come here."

She opened her big, blue eyes, and buried her white teeth in her coral lip. "Why, papa!"

He was ashamed of himself now, and so he said: "I'm in no mood for company, Laura; and, indeed, I think we had better start for Maryland in a week at the furthest. This place is too busy and obtrusive for me."

"Yes, it was busy, and meddlesome," she said; and then, while in her secret heart she determined not to leave Newport, she said, "I prefer Robsart Place to this cottage anyway, and the Chesapeake to the sea, at all times."

He was pleased. "You are ever giving in to me," he said, "and some day you'll not regret it."

In the dusky twilight John Nevin came over to Rockledge. Laura met him on the colonnade, and gave him a cordial welcome.

"You are looking lovely this evening," he said.

"And you," she answered, smiling, "are as sad-faced as ever. Do you know that you remind me of but one person in the world, and that an actor whom I once saw play 'Hamlet' in Leeds."

"You, on the other hand, remind me of two other persons," he replied.

She laughed—that old, joyous, rippling laugh—and asked: "And who are those two?"

"A friend of my cousin Alice is one, and Goethe's 'Marguerite' the other."

She curled her lip in disbelief, and they walked down the path toward the sea.

When they tired of rambling about, John found a seat for her on a mossy stone. They could see the sea from where they sat, looking wan and gray in the gloaming, and hear the cool swash of the waves, as they lapped the sandy shore, or thumped themselves white against the rocks.

Presently a boat hove in sight, and, as it approached, they saw a man sitting in the stern. He was thrumming on a guitar, and singing, in a rich, clear voice, "HER BRIGHT SMILE HAUNTS ME STILL."

It was too dark to discern the features of the man, but both of them recognized the voice. Laura turned deathly pale, and trembled like an aspen.

"It's Gilbert Rook," she said.

"Yes, and the fellow's as crazy as ever," said John. "It was very unfortunate for you that you ever met him."

"I wish I never had," she said, rising. "I can never tell the reason why, but I have a gloomy, undefined dread of *that* man."

"His persistent attentions to you have caused this," said John, endeavoring to free her from apprehension, "and the knowledge that he has a wife and family in England doubtless gives a deeper tinge to this vague fear."

"No; it may be partly that, but it is not wholly so; from the first moment I set eyes upon him at Bath, I felt as if he was to be my evil genius, and hard as I have tried to get rid of the notion, it clings to me yet."

She shrugged her pretty shoulders and shivered.

"I wouldn't mind," said John, after a moment of silence. "The fellow was, possibly, crazy before you met him, and, but for his admiration of you, his malady would doubtless have assumed a more violent form."

She sighed, and gave John Nevin her hand. He pressed it warmly, and they turned away from the sobbing sea, walking silently toward Rockledge, while the sad song of Gilbert Rook rung in their ears:

"Many dangers I have known
That a reckless life can fill—
But her presence has not flown—
Her bright smile haunts me still!"

He parted with her at the colonnade, and she watched him out of sight.

"When is all this misery to end?" she muttered, aloud.

"When women are not false as fair."

The answer came in a deep, solemn voice, and Laura only lifted her eyes to let them fall on a weird, haggard woman, who stood like a pic-

ture of despair almost within arm's length of her.

Laura Robsart was chilled through and through with a nameless dread.

"Who are you?" she managed to say.

"Don't you know me?"

The strange woman's voice was hard and cold.

"You are devoid of memory, I see, as well as conscience."

There was something familiar, even in that chilling tone, and Laura now, determined to solve the mystery at once, said:

"Why have you come here—what do you want of me?"

"I am playing the role of Nemesis, was the answer. "I want vengeance, or my own!"

"What have I of yours? Are you crazy, woman?"

"No, only desperate."

"What do you mean by asking me for your own, then, in this threatening way? I have nothing belonging to you or yours."

"Yes, you have." The woman's breath was coming quick and hard now.

"What is it?" and as Laura put the question, she shrunk away in terror.

"My husband's heart."

"His name?" gasped Laura.

"Gilbert Rook!"

Laura shrieked as if a knife had penetrated her heart, and fell in a heap at the woman's feet.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL ABOUT LOVE.

WHEN John Nevin reached the hotel, he found Mabel and Alice talking to George Dalby on the veranda.

"Here's Nevin," said the latter, as John approached. "Now, to use *Cuttle's* words, he can give us 'an opinion as is an opinion.'"

"On what?" asked John.

"We were talking about Mrs. Browning's poem, 'Loved Once,' and while the young ladies here have clung to the poet's assertion, that true love never passes away, I have maintained that a man may madly love a woman to-day, and to-morrow view her charms with indifference, or even, in extreme cases, with aversion."

John Nevin thought of Laura, and said:

"I hardly agree with you, Dalby. Love is a sort of infatuation—it is hard to cure, no matter how unreasonable it may be, or how disagreeable the consequences."

"But should you discover the object of your devotion to be wholly unworthy, you don't mean to say that love outlives respect?"

Alice had her black, glowing eyes fixed full on John Nevin's face, as he answered:

"Most assuredly not; respect and admiration are the source of love. If these be dried up, the tender plant perishes for lack of nourishment."

"Then you agree with Mr. Dalby that Mrs. Browning is in error, when she says, 'he never loved who says "I loved once."'"

It was Alice who spoke, and she addressed herself to John.

"He replied; "Yes, I take sides against the

poet, but I agree with the other poet, Tennyson, when he says:

'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.'

The conversation was interrupted, at this point, by the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Houston. The former brought a letter for Mabel, from Joe Dormer, and excusing herself, she ran up stairs to her room, to read the precious missive.

It was a lengthy epistle, covering eight pages of large-sized letter-paper, and it was full of tender words, prettily put.

"I work all day in the mines," he wrote, "and at night I study hard, and think of my dear little girl in the States, whom I am trying, ever so hard, to make myself worthy of."

He concluded by asking her for her picture, by return mail, and mentioned that Adam spoke of her every day, and hoped soon to see her again.

She kissed the letter, and forgot in her rapture all the fine speeches of George Dalby.

She was sitting by an open window, looking out into the night, with Joe's letter open in her lap, when Alice came up-stairs.

"What does Joe say?" she asked.

"That he is doing grandly; and that he is going to the Legislature; and better still, he is coming home soon!"

Alice did not seem to hear the reply, for she threw herself at full length upon the bed, and broke out into a fit of sobbing.

"Why, Alice, dear, what is the matter?"

"Oh, I don't know; everybody seems to be happy, but me."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing."

"Did anybody say any thing to you?"

"No."

"Was it John?"

Alice almost screamed, and Mabel knew now what she had guessed all along—that it was John.

She did not attempt to console her at once; she knew tears were a good panacea for an aching heart; but after the first gust had blown by, she said:

"John is very queer in his ways; still, I believe he loves you."

"But there is that woman—Laura. He is not cold to her,"—with a sob—"and Mabel, everybody knows she can wrap him around her fingers. Dalby said as much, a while ago."

"Dalby says so many things that he is scarce worth the minding. I believe John Nevin is a man of honor, and whatever influence this wicked woman may have upon him now, I don't think he will refuse to fulfill his engagement with you."

Alice put up her hands deprecatingly.

"Oh, Mabel! how can you talk so?"

"Talk so! What do you mean?"

"You don't think I would have John Nevin's hand, if his heart belonged to that woman? You surely could not think so meanly of me."

Mabel did not reply. She felt that she was wholly unfit for a counselor in such a desperate strait. But, after a moment's silence, she replied:

"If I were you, I would tell Captain Houston

the whole story, and he can inform John of the effect of his conduct; perhaps that will bring matters to a crisis."

"No; I could never do that, either," sighed Alice. "Better let events shape their own course; we must not do anything—can not do any thing, but wait."

Young as Mabel was, she felt she could not sit idly by, and see her dearest friend suffer, and while she loosened the silken braids of Alice's hair, that night, she thought out a plan, which only required daylight to put it into execution.

Long after Alice had sobbed herself to sleep, Mabel lay wide awake, thinking out what she should say to Laura Robsart in the morning.

CHAPTER IX.

A MEETING.

LAURA'S shriek rung through Rockledge, sharp, wild, piercing, and brought the servants pell-mell to the colonnade, closely followed by Elton Robsart.

"What's wrong?" he asked, excitedly.

"What's wrong here?"

"The young Missus has fainted," replied Price, the steward. "Somethin's scared her."

They carried her into the drawing-room, and bathed her temples and wrists with water.

With the first gleam of returning consciousness she realized the situation, and with her ready wit and iron will, prepared to meet it boldly.

"What was it, Laura, darling? What frightened you?"

She smiled up into the old man's face.

"A nasty ugly bat flew right in my eyes. It was very weak and absurd to faint about so trivial a matter, but it scared me terribly. You know, Papa Robsart, I'm such a baby."

She wound her white arms about the old man's neck, and he bent over and kissed her, as he would a petted child.

That night Laura Robsart sat at her chamber window, and wondered what had brought Gilbert Rook's wife to America, and wondered, too, why she should be blamed for stealing Gilbert Rook's heart.

It was late the next morning when she came down to breakfast. She had not yet finished her meal, when a servant came to her:

"If madam pleases, there's a young lady in the drawin' room who wishes to see you when you are at leisure."

She got up at once. Her appetite was not a craving one, and, after smoothing her hair, and shaking out the ample folds of her morning-wrapper, she tripped into the long, cool drawing-room.

As she entered, Mabel Lynn arose, and the two women looked into each other's eyes.

Laura Robsart's heart stood still, and she felt herself growing faintish and weak. Clutching at a chair, she managed to say:

"I have been very ill, excuse me—I—I feel faint. Did you wish to see me, miss?"

The tall mirrors, which lined that splendid apartment, reflected two faces that bore a strik-

ing resemblance to each other; indeed, so much so, that the owners of both were considerably abashed.

Mabel was the first to recover.

"You will excuse me, madam, for intruding on your privacy; but when you learn my motive, I trust you will not consider my mission either unladylike or obtrusive."

Laura bowed.

"Go on—speak freely."

Mabel hung down her head. She did not know how to begin. Finally she managed to say:

"You know John Nevin?"

"Yes, very well."

Laura was calm, now, as a summer sea; she had control of every nerve and muscle again.

"He met you in Europe?"

"Yes," with a smile.

"And fell in love with you?"

Laura lifted her brows in affected surprise.

"Really, I could not say you are correct. The gentleman has not been so frank as you, miss."

"But it's true; and you, madam—you *must* know it."

"Must I?"

"Yes, you *must*!" Mabel was getting angry at this fencing and banter. "He was here last evening, and the night before."

"You seem to keep a strict watch on Mr. Nevin's comings and goings. Is he anything to you?"

"No; nothing in the world."

"Then why are you so interested in where he spends his evenings?"

"Because John Nevin is already engaged to his cousin Alice."

Laura bit her lip, and, after a pause, said:

"Well, what have I got to do with all this? I'm not John Nevin's keeper."

"No; but you could make a good, pure girl supremely happy, if you only will."

Mabel spoke pleadingly, and she noticed that the iceberg was beginning to melt.

"What would you have me do?"

"Discard John Nevin," replied Mabel, promptly. "Tell him, when he comes again, that you have heard of his engagement to his cousin; that you do not love him a bit, and that, if he cannot be true to one woman he cannot be to another."

"And why should I do this?"

"Why should you do this? Because, if you don't, between you and him, you'll break Alice Houston's heart."

"And suppose I do this for you—will you think well of me for it?"

"If you do this, you deserve to be thought well of, and I will pray for you as long as I live, night and morning."

Tears were gathering in Laura's eyes, as she added:

"I will do this thing—this thing you ask of me. For your sake—mind, for you."

"God bless you!" exclaimed Mabel, catching Laura's hand and kissing it. "You are not a bad woman—you are an angel."

Laura Robsart wound her arms tightly about Mabel, and replied, through blinding tears:

"Think of me always as unfortunate, but not wicked; more sinned against than sinning."

They parted then, but, ere Mabel left the room, Laura asked her her name:

"Mabel Lynn," was the reply. "Not hard to remember."

"No, not hard."

Laura bowed and smiled, and when the retreating footfalls died away, she for a moment stood like a statue of whitest marble, there, where they had parted, her great blue eyes full of a yearning, agonizing light.

"Oh, come back to me, Mabel Lynn," she cried, at length, through ashen lips. "Come back to me, vision of youth and beauty! Come back to me!"

She fell upon her face on the carpet, and showered kisses on the spot where Mabel Lynn had stood but a moment since!

CHAPTER X.

DROWNED.

AT noon, on that same day, Gilbert Rook's body was washed ashore, about a quarter of a mile south of Rockledge. It was found, with the wreck of his boat, and, naturally enough, everybody supposed that there had been a capsize, and this was the result—a lifeless body, with matted hair, leering eyes, and open mouth.

The news spread like wildfire, far and near, and finally reached the ears of Sarah Rook—his wife.

She came down the shore, beating her hands together like cymbals, and shrieking:

"I knew it would come to this! I knew it would—I knew it would!"

But when she had elbowed her way through the dense throng, and caught sight of the ruin death had made, she turned black in the face, and, shaking her fist at Rockledge, cried:

"'Twas all her doings—the painted, beautiful devil; 'twas all her doings!"

Then she fell upon the ugly heap—all wet, and slimy, and bloated, and sobbed hysterically.

As the sun went down that evening, Gilbert Rook was buried.

Only a few curious people stood at the grave beside Sarah Rook.

The yellow clods rattled noisily upon the coffin-lid; the woman stared into the yawning grave; the sun dropped lower and lower, and the spectators, awe-struck, stole silently, one by one, away.

When the sexton had finished his work, Sarah Rook turned away, too, with a dumb, tearless agony in her face, that made her look actually frightful.

"Mrs. Rook. Say, Mrs. Rook!"

She looked around, and met the gaze of a coarse, middle-aged man.

"Well, what do you want?"

He was unprepared for the query; it was so cold and blunt, it confused him.

"I'm sorry for your trouble," he said.

She scanned his face closely; it was not a very sympathetic face.

"Well," she said, "what good does that do?"

"I thought mebbe—"

She interrupted him—

"It would bring him to life, eh? No, sorrow won't do that; it's a very weakish thing, sorrow

is; it will neither restore life nor give revenge."

"But mine may," he said, quickly.

"What? Restore life?"

"No, give revenge."

She grasped him by the arm, never noticing that he was a rough, uncouth, unshaven man, whom she would have avoided once, as if his ugliness and roughness was contagious.

"What do you know that will give me revenge on *her*? Speak out! You have a tongue, have you not?"

"Don't go on that way," he said. "You act like a bedlamite, and if you're mad, I don't want to have anything to do with you."

"I'm as sane as you are; I hear every word you say; but my blood is on fire, and you tantalize me with your cool words and ambiguous expressions. Why don't you speak?"

He looked down at the diamonds on her fingers.

"My information cost me a good deal, and it's worth something, I suppose; leastwise, it ought to be."

"You want money," she said, divining the fellow's meaning at once. "How much?"

"Oh, I don't know; whatever you think is right."

Her lips curled at this shallow appeal to her generosity. "It is not a question of right," she replied. "You know something that can be used against *this woman*; I am willing to buy the secret. Do I understand the case?"

"Perfectly."

"Then, as I said before, what is your price?"

"Well, one of them diamond rings to start on, and say five hundred dollars when she's convicted."

Sarah Rook's eyes fairly blazed as she asked, "Convicted of what?"

"*Murder!*" he hoarsely whispered.

She slipped off the largest diamond and placed it in his hand.

"It's a bargain," she said with her white lips.

"When will I see you again?"

"To-night."

"Where?"

"On the beach where he was found."

"At what hour?"

"Midnight."

It was agreed upon.

CHAPTER XI.

ILL TIDINGS.

LAURA ROBSART was sitting in the reception-room of Rockledge, when Clowes, the waiting-woman, came to her with a wild look, exclaiming:

"Oh, my lady! the dreadfulest thing has happened down at the beach."

"Down at the beach?"

"Yes, my lady; the tall gentleman's drowned—washed ashore, my lady, stiff and stark."

"What tall gentleman? Not Mr. Nevin, is it?"

Laura was flushed and excited as she spoke.

"No, not Mr. Nevin; he is a deal too sharp to go paddling around at night in a leaky boat, and get upset in this dreadful way."

"Oh, please, Clowes, do tell me who it is they have found?"

"The Englishman, my lady—Mr. Rook!"

"Gilbert Rook—*dead!*"

Laura stared at the woman, as if she was determined to look her out of this fearful news, but poor Clowes only held her mouth wide open, and panted with the excitement of the occasion.

"Give me water—a drink," demanded the mistress, and mechanically the maid obeyed.

The water had a good effect, and Laura said, quite coolly:

"This is very unpleasant news, Clowes; but please don't trouble yourself with carrying such stories in the future—to me, at least. They are very disagreeable; they make me nervous. Where is your master?"

"In the library, my lady."

"Thank you."

She swept out of the room, along the hall, and surprised Elton, who had tried to read, but had given up the task, and fell to dozing.

"Papa Robsart!"

He opened his eyes.

"Sleeping, eh? Pardon me. I thought you were sitting up."

She was turning away again, but he stretched out his hand, and caught her dress.

"Don't go," he said. "I would rather talk and look at you than sleep."

"Would you?"

She bent over and kissed him.

"You are always complimentary. I don't know really what I'd do without you."

She was purring about like a cat—all soft, downy fur, and without claws.

"Cleve must have been very happy with you, Laura. He was kind, I hope?"

The woman's gaze sought the floor.

"Very kind!"

"You never quarreled, love?"

She hesitated an instant; then she responded with a little laugh:

"Oh, how silly!"

He was satisfied with the reply, and pressed the hand that lay in his so confidently.

"There was something very hot-headed about Cleve," he remarked, after a while, "that was hard to put up with at all times, but he could not fight with an angel. Poor boy!"

Elton Robsart heaved a deep sigh; and then Laura, anxious to change the conversation, said abruptly:

"I'm sick and tired of Newport, papa. When are we going back to Maryland?"

"When you please!"

"Then let us go back to-morrow morning, or better still, we can go to-night, on the ten train."

"But that's so sudden, and running away in the night, too!"

"It will give us an opportunity to sleep the miles away," she urged. "I prefer night-traveling. Sitting all day in a car is so stupid."

He looked up, surprised.

"You seem to be in a great hurry, Laura. Has John Nevin been less devout, or—"

"I wish to get away from him," she interrupted. "You said you didn't like him, and didn't want him to come here any more. Now, the only way to get rid of persistently-polite people, is to run away from them."

"Do you think so?" He was pleased with her more than ever.

"Yes, I think so, because it saves talk, and worry, and explanation. I hate explanations!"

She said this with force, and none within hearing could question that she meant it.

"You are right, Laura," he answered; "and matters shall be arranged just as you wish. We will leave to-night, at ten, if possible; if we can't be ready in time, we'll get off at five in the morning, sure."

At ten o'clock on that same evening, Laura and Elton Robsart departed from Rockledge, in a close carriage. The old gentleman was drowsy, and leaned back on the soft cushions as the vehicle whirled along, past rows of cottages, and knots of strollers; past laughing ladies, and gay gallants. But Laura leaned out of the open window, and listened eagerly for every sound.

The carriage had to pause in front of the Ocean House, to allow a cluster of vehicles to discharge their burdens, and then Laura leaned back into the shadows, out of reach of the searching light.

George Dalby and Mabel were walking on the veranda of the hotel, talking about the sensation of the hour—Gilbert Rook's death—and the former said, all unconscious of Laura's near proximity:

"Most people condemn her, notwithstanding the prevalent belief that she gave him no encouragement. It's the way of the world, though; first the murdered man receives all the sympathy, and the populace demand blood on the old Jewish plea, which gives an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but, when the accused comes before the tribunal for trial—*presto* change! the tide turns in favor of the murderer; every extenuating circumstance is made the most of, and, if a court and jury withstand the current, and erect a scaffold, the culprit goes off the stage before a weeping auditory."

"But, I don't think she ever gave him any encouragement," said Mabel, warmly; "I think she is too good, too tender, to wound any person's feelings knowingly."

The driver cracked his whip, and the carriage rolled away out of sound of the voices, and Laura Robsart thanked God that Mabel Lynn—above all other persons in the world—thought well of her.

CHAPTER XII.

BENT ON VENGEANCE.

THE moon, which was now a fortnight old, was hiding itself in misty, hazy wreaths, and sinking slowly into the waters of the wide Atlantic, as Sarah Rook, her form wrapped in a heavy black cloak, the cowl of which was drawn tightly over her head, stole out of a beautiful cottage to the west of the Ocean House, and hurried along the beach.

Before leaving her apartment, she had consulted her tiny jeweled time-piece, and found she had but a quarter of an hour to reach the place of assignation, and now she feared that she would be too late, and that the strange man would not care for waiting, and would go off with the precious secret and her diamonds.

"He will surely wait," she muttered, as she hurried along, panting and almost breathless; "he will not disappoint me—he could not be so

cruel, after filling me with such hope. No, no; he will wait."

On, on, she flew; now sinking ankle deep in the sand, now stumbling along on the loose shingle; now falling heavily among the jagged rocks; now staggering to her feet again, and hurrying forward.

Presently she came in sight of the place of meeting. Her heart sunk within her. There was no rough man, nor, for that matter, no man of any sort, in view.

She slackened her pace and rubbed her hands on her dress.

"Perhaps he is a little late as well as myself," she muttered. "If I could not be punctual, who have so much at stake, why should he be?"

She was standing now on the very spot where, twelve hours before, Gilbert Rook lay dead.

"This is the stone that they put under his head," she said, kicking a small, round pebble with her gaiter; "and there is the mark of his head yet in the sand."

She smiled; but it was not a smile of joy, it was a smile that made her dark face look hideous in the sickly moonlight. It would have been less appalling, less terrible, to have heard her shriek out the bitterness and gall that were in her heart.

There was a crackle as of crunching sand, and the rough man stood beside her.

She started when she saw him; he had come so suddenly upon her.

"I thought you would never come," she said. "I'm tired waiting on you."

"I have been here this half-hour," he replied, "sitting behind the rocks there. I'm soaked with dew."

"Never mind the dew and the cold; this will be a good night's work for you. But, your name, man. What's your name?"

"Well, different names."

"What do you mean by different names?"

"I mean that I am sometimes called one thing, and sometimes another. In Texas they called me Sam Blaize, and in California they called me Texas."

"But, your real name?"

"Is Blaize. Samuel B. Blaize."

"Very well, Mr. Blaize. You know this woman—Laura Robsart?"

"Well, yes; I reckon I know her pretty well; that is, I did know her in California."

"How many years ago?"

The man took off his hat and scratched his head meditatively.

"Can't you remember?"

"Hold up a little; just keep cool," he said, putting up his hand as if to ward off interruption. "My memory's got a little rusty of late. Let me see, I was at Red Gulch in '55, and that was three years before. Ah! I remember now, the last time I seen her was on the night of the 18th of November, 1852."

"How do you fix the date so precisely?" She was eying him closely.

"How do I fix it—eh? Mighty easy. I came nearer handing in my chips that day, than ever I did before or since."

She had never heard the phrase, "handing in my chips," but she understood him, nevertheless.

"You came near dying—eh?"

"Mighty near it. The vigilantes were going to try me at daylight, and a hanging mostly followed fast on the heels of one of their short trials, I can tell you. But my time hadn't come yet, I suppose, and Fate in the shape of an Indian squaw, cut me loose from the tree where they had tied me, and I took to the mountains for my life."

"But Laura?" she interrupted; "what about her?"

"I was coming to her," he said. Then he paused.

"There'll be no trouble about the five hundred?" he questioned.

"You shall have double the sum—go on."

She was all eagerness.

"Well, as I was making my way over Klamath mountain—you see, this was in Syskyou county—and keeping Ovo Fino well to my left, I heard a woman scream."

"A woman scream!"

"Then I saw that there was a ranch kind of nestling against the rough mountain side, and that the yell had come from there."

"I see—well?"

"I was curious, and, forgetting that I was running away myself from danger and death, I sneaked up to the only window the ranch had, and peeped in."

"Well, well—go on. What did you see?"

"I seen that woman that's called Laura Robsart, and that was not the first time I seen her either; but, it was the last time until I chanced to meet her here, a day or two ago."

"But, what made her scream?—what was she doing? Oh, man, you're driving me frantic with this rambling rigmarole. Why don't you come to the matter at once? What did you see?"

There were two men coming along the beach, walking arm in arm, and singing a duo from "Martha."

He glanced at them only; then he stooped over and whispered something in Sarah Rook's ear.

She clutched his arm.

"You can prove this?"

"I saw it with my own eyes."

"And you will—you will, swear to it, for— for money?"

"But I don't know about going back to the Pacific. They might ask me to settle my old account, you see."

"You needn't be afraid of that," she said.

"Seventeen years brings about a good many changes; the witnesses in your case are possibly all dead, or have forgotten the deed. Here, take this."

She gave him another diamond, which flashed in his eyes, and drove the fear from his heart.

"I'll swear to what I saw with my own eyes," he said, determinedly.

CHAPTER XIII.

DESERTED.

JOHN NEVIN was shocked when he came over to Rockledge the next morning, and found no one but Price there. The latter had been left behind to close the house and see that every thing was properly secured.

He pushed by the man and walked up the path to the house.

When he had reached the colonnade he heard Price shouting:

"There's no one at home—all gone to Maryland," I tell you."

John Nevin paused. The truth burst upon him now.

John Nevin felt very lonely. He would have given a great deal to have heard that bounding step and rippling laugh echo in his ears at that moment; But, no; that was impossible; and so he beat the vine-leaves with his cane, and fell to wondering why Laura had gone off so suddenly, without even so much as leaving him a parting word.

He sighed; cast a lingering, yearning look about him; thought of the few pleasant hours he had spent there with her, and walked slowly down the avenue, by the bowed form of the old servant, and out onto the open beach.

Roaming aimlessly up and down the shore, with no companion but his thoughts, and all the time brooding over his disappointment, made John Nevin look sadder, graver than ever.

"Hello, John! what's up? You look like the front entrance to an undertaker's shop."

It was Dalby, as gay, dashing, laughing as ever.

John was in no mood now to entertain one so lively; and desirous of getting rid of the artist, he said, simply:

"Do I?"

"Yes, indeed, you do. I wouldn't say so if you didn't. But, the cause—my soul, the cause of all this?"

Nevin smiled, but said nothing.

"There must be a cause," added Dalby, "or there would not, in fact, could not, be an effect. Now, that's cogent reasoning, ain't it?" with a laugh.

"Very."

"Well, now, I propose to trace the effect to its source, and, if possible, lift this hideous lumbago from your back. May I?"

"If you have nothing else to do," replied John. "But I'd advise you to seek more profitable employment. I'm a very dull fellow, Dalby, as you will discover on investigation."

He was beginning to like George Dalby, despite himself.

"Assertions are worth nothing, when unsupported, and especially when arrayed against facts," said the artist, in reply. "You say you are dull; the facts prove you are sharp. You never talk at random, as I do; never tread on tender people's corns; never make an effort to please the fair sex; and yet, in view of all this, you are quietly smashing hearts as if they were empty champagne bottles, and making friends in every quarter."

Nevin put up his hand: "A truce—I beg a truce. You talk nonsense so fast that I can't keep up with you."

"You deny the charges, then?"

"In toto—from Alpha to Omega."

"The charge of heart-breaking as well?"

"That, more than any."

Dalby drew a long breath and heaved a mock sigh. "It's very strange."

"What is strange?"

"That a man can, without his knowledge, fall in love with one woman, and have two crazy after him."

John Nevin started. Dalby was treading on unpleasant—ay, even dangerous ground, but the latter's curiosity compelled him to ask:

"Who are these two women? and who am I supposed to be in love with?"

"Well," said Dalby, "just to freshen your memory, I will mention names, though I didn't think it was necessary. The woman whom you love is Laura Robsart, sometimes called the beautiful widow, and the women who love you are this self-same beauty, and your charming cousin, Miss Alice Houston."

"How do you know this—that Alice cares for me?"

"Ah! I see you confess to the first count in the indictment. That is very frank, indeed, and I shall be equally frank with you. The truth is, I guessed a part, and Miss Lynn—Mabel, unwittingly dropped a hint. This guess and hint I added together, and by a simple yet ingenious trick, known only to myself, and for which I claim the sole credit of invention, I arrived at the result—or fact, whichever you like to call it."

John Nevin smiled, a dry, peculiar smile, and after a pause, added:

"And so, Mabel Lynn told you that cousin Alice loved me, eh?"

"Well, no; not exactly that. She said something about an old engagement between you and Alice, and that she knew Alice liked you better than she did any one else. But see—there goes old Col. Rowley, and his niece, Miss Pollock. Let's join them. I'll introduce you; nice people; live out West."

"No, thank you," replied John; "some other time."

"All right—sorry—good-by."

He was gone, and John Nevin thanked his stars to be rid of him.

"The rattle-brained fellow is clever, after all," he said to himself, as he saw him offer his arm to the stylish Miss Pollock, and saunter gayly away. "Takes the world as he finds it; loves art for the money that's in it, and manages, on a few hundred dollars, to be excessively happy."

Then John Nevin fell to thinking of that old engagement to Alice, and to wondering if she really cared for him, or desired to have that ancient promise fulfilled.

When he reached the Ocean House he met Alice and Mabel. They were waiting for the phaeton to go out for a drive.

"Will you come with us, John?" asked Mabel.

Alice did not speak, but colored a little, and looked up at the sky.

That modest blush, and shy manner, pleased him; he thought it very maidenly—very womanly, and replied, promptly:

"I'll be very happy to go."

Mabel sat up with the driver, and John and Alice crowded into the back seat. He was very attentive, and she was, of course, very happy.

CHAPTER XIV.

ON THE TRAIL.

THE steamer Daisy, from Baltimore, bound for Norfolk, was sweeping down the Chesapeake, leaving a foamy path behind her, and staining the beautiful July sky with curling smoke.

In the cabin of the Daisy sat Sarah Rook and Sam Blaize. The woman's face wore a determined look, and the man appeared considerably annoyed.

"Now, what's the use of this?" he broke out. She did not answer him, and so he answered himself: "No use at all—not a bit!" he continued, looking at Sarah Rook, whose eyes were bent on the floor. "If there was any thing to be gained by it, I wouldn't care."

"There is something to be gained," she replied—"a great deal to be gained."

"I'd like to know what it is?" he demanded.

"There's no use in telling you; you couldn't understand it if I did. It takes a woman to understand a woman, and you—why you are not even a sharp man."

Blaize felt this depreciation, and it caused him to flare up a little. "Well, if I ain't sharp, then I'm no use to you, and we'd better quit at once, and for good."

Her face expressed her contempt for the speech and the speaker.

"You are a bigger fool than I took you for, Sam Blaize. Suppose, now, you go from me, where will you make as much money, and as easily?"

"But what's the use in losing time this way?"

He was more humble now.

"We are not losing time, I tell you. When that old attorney Holland said that we would have to go to California, and have a warrant issued there before we could have her arrested, the idea of delay made me almost sick; for it was granting her six or nine months of respite, of pleasure, and I was so eager to precipitate the avalanche, to let the sword fall at once."

"But there was no help for it," interrupted Blaize. "That's the law, and we can't change it, nohow we try."

"But, there is a way of making her miserable while we're abroad, and my woman's wit discovered it at once."

"What way is that?"

"By telling her that I know of her crime, and that I intend to haunt her into her grave."

Sarah Rook's eyes glared as she spoke, with a fierce light, and she clenched her hands tightly. But for fear of the law she would bury them in Laura Robsart's round, white throat.

"But what if she should run away?" queried Sam.

"She won't do that. Where would she run to? Besides, she would as soon die herself as to let old Elton Robsart know her secret. This will keep her at Robsart Place until we want her."

"Yes, I suppose you are right," replied Blaize.

She arose, went to the cabin window, and looked out on the bay; while Blaize strode leisurely into the gentlemen's cabin, picked up a copy of the *Baltimore Sun*, and was soon deeply absorbed in the details of a wrestling

match which had taken place the day before at Old Point Comfort.

The Daisy reached Sydneytown at six o'clock instead of five, and the sun was setting when Mrs. Rook and Sam Blaize turned their backs on the port, and walked up the only street the town could boast of, although now, when I come to think of it, it's hardly possible that such a forlorn old town as this ever boasted of any thing.

"It's a rum old hole," remarked Blaize, as he gazed up at the frame church, the open steeple of which disclosed a rusty bell. "Seems to me if I wanted the world to forget I was alive I'd come to Sydneytown."

"Yes, it's a very ancient-looking settlement," answered Mrs. Rook. "But, where is the hotel?"

"Can't say for that. Better go ahead till we find one."

They came to it at last. It was called the Calvert House, and had a great swinging sign before the door representing the founder of Maryland, in a cocked hat, trimmed with a poor imitation of real lace, a profusion of powdered hair, and a rather damaged-looking crimson coat. The building was a two-storied affair, with a long porch in front and a battalion of dormer windows on the mossy roof. There were two doors; one wide, the other narrow. The former led into the bar-room; the latter, through courtesy, was called the "Ladies' Entrance," and opened into a dim, plainly-furnished sitting-room.

Calvert Pittock, the proprietor of this establishment, was a little round man, with a Falstaffian physique and a bald head. He was a pleasant person; always had a smile for a customer, and was shrewd enough to charge just as much as his guests would pay, without grumbling.

He was all in a flutter of delight when he ushered the travelers into the parlor and ordered the black servant to prepare a room for the lady.

"How long do you intend stopping at Sydneytown?" he asked.

"As to that I could not say yet," answered Sarah Rook. "Probably a day or two."

"Ah! yes; not on a long visit, then; merely a flying trip from—"

He paused and looked inquiringly at Blaize.

"From Baltimore," added Mrs. Rook.

"Just so! just so! From Baltimore, eh? Beautiful city; delightful trip down the bay."

He was straightening the table-cloth, and dusting the stiff-backed wooden chairs, as he made these remarks.

"Do you know where Robsart Place is?" questioned Mrs. Rook, after a moment's silence.

"Oh, bless your soul and body, yes; of course I do. I have lived here in Sydneytown these three-and-twenty years. Come down from Annapolis here. Used to live in Washington; saw Jackson inaugurated. Yes, ma'm; I've seen a good deal of the ups and downs of this world."

Mrs. Rook smiled at the boastful words. "I presume you have; but how far is it from here to Robsart Place?"

He stopped dusting the chairs, looked down at the floor a minute, pursed up his lips, and while he drew a very red lid over a very watery

blue eye, replied: "Well, let me see. Go in a hack?"

"No."

"On horseback?"

"No; I'll walk."

"Ah! afoot—eh? Then your best way is through the woods. There's a path from my back door leads directly there. The roadway is almost a half-mile fair measurement, but the path cuts it down to a quarter and a fraction."

"Thank you."

"You're perfectly welcome," answered Calvert Pittock. "I always tries to oblige my customers; it makes things pleasanter all round."

He smiled blandly, bowed, and left the room.

"When are you going over?" asked Blaize.

"After dark," was the reply.

CHAPTER XV.

FACE TO FACE.

ON that same evening on which Sarah Rook came to Sydneytown, there was a sort of *fete* at Robsart Place. A half-dozen planters, with their wives and daughters, were there in response to an invitation from old Elton, who desired to compensate his pet Laura for the loss of Newport's pleasures by a little home gayety.

"Doctor Foster, who has just returned from a trip to South America, will be here with his sister, Mrs. Judge Placide," said Elton, as Laura whisked into the room in a cloud of snowy swiss, "and as he is said to be a lover of music, I want my little girl to do her best to charm him."

Laura laughed. "Perhaps he is as critical as ardent; and remember, your opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, I'm not a burning Sappho by any means."

"But you must sing for him."

"Why must I?"

"I want you to please him."

"Indeed!" She raised her pretty arched eyebrows. "And why should I, pray? You don't want to make a match, do you?"

"No, no; I want him to praise you. It does me good to hear people praise you—to know they feel the power of your beauty and accomplishments, and—"

"But that is very dangerous work, papa Robsart," she interrupted. "It's playing with fire, you know, and what if I should fall a victim to Doctor Foster's powers at the same time he falls a captive to mine? Would not that be a dilemma, now?"

Yes; he confessed it would, but he thought there was no danger. "You're a woman of good sense, Laura, and of course you don't need a husband—and—"

She put her arms around his neck, and kissed him playfully.

"Certainly I don't."

Then she went to the piano and played a sweet, doleful melody, the last notes of which were dying away as the carriage, containing the first of her guests, bowled up the avenue.

"That's the Perrys, exclaimed the old man, rising and giving his cravat a twist. "I know by the speed they came at. They always drive at a gallop."

"It was the Perrys; two daughters and a son, with a colored servant on horseback.

Laura kissed the girls, and bowed to the young man as she welcomed them in the receiving-room.

By this time guest after guest began to arrive, and finally the Placides' carriage, with young Doctor Foster in it, came whirling along.

The Perry girls, who had met the youthful disciple of Esculapius before, buzzed and fluttered about him like moths in the lamp-light, while Laura, after being introduced, turned away to entertain his sister, Mrs. Judge Placide.

The eyes of the young physician followed her, however, and the *fete* was scarce an hour old ere he managed to free himself from the witchery of the Perry girls, and seek out Laura.

The old folks were playing whist and backgammon in the reception-room, while the young people were waltzing in the brilliant *salon*. There was no formality anywhere; everybody had come to enjoy themselves, and judging from the animation of the scene, they were doing so.

When Doctor Foster came across Laura, she was leaning over Elton Robsart's chair, looking into his handful of cards.

"Interested in the game?" he asked.

"Not particularly."

"Have you any objections to a stroll?"

"None; where shall we go?"

"Into the garden."

"Very well."

She placed her little dimpled hand on his arm, ever so lightly, and they turned away from the players.

"If milady pleases," said Rebecca, the English maid, plucking Laura's skirt, "there's a lady wishes to see you on some business in the garden."

"Business!" exclaimed Laura.

"Yes, milady; private business, she says."

"Then tell her to come to-morrow; I'm engaged now."

"I told her so myself, but she wouldn't take no for an answer. No, milady; pardon me; but she says it's better for yourself that you see her to-night."

Laura was frightened at these words, but controlled herself admirably, and said, turning to Doctor Foster:

"You will have to excuse me, doctor, until I see what this person wants."

"Alms, I presume," he said, a little nettled at the interruption.

"Very likely," was the reply; and then laughing lightly, Laura Robsart tripped down the short flight of stairs, and out into the garden.

"Where is this person, Rebecca?" she said, in a calm, earnest voice.

"At the foot of the red oak, milady."

"Then, Rebecca, you needn't trouble yourself further. I'll go alone."

"Yes, milady."

The servant walked back to the house, and Laura hurried along down the shell-paved walk, until she came in sight of the red oak, which stood in a little clearing apart from the rest of the trees, and was so huge and leafy that, under its wide-spread branches, there was a perpetual gloom.

Deep as this was, however, and dark as was the night, she managed to descry the figure of a woman leaning carelessly against the trunk of the tree.

"What can this person want with me?" she muttered; "and then to send me such a peremptory message; to order me here as if I was her menial!"

By this time she had reached the place of meeting, and the dark figure advanced toward her.

Laura stepped back quickly. "What do you want?" she demanded. "Who are you?"

The woman threw up her vail that had, up to this time, concealed her features, and revealed the face of Sarah Rook!

Laura started, but she did not scream nor cry out, but said:

"What do you want? and why have you dared to come here?"

"You should know that, by this time," answered the English woman. "I have been wronged by you, Laura Robsart, and did you think for a moment that I would fold my hands quietly, and let you off, while you owed me revenge for that wrong? If you did, you are a great deal more innocent than I took you to be."

Laura tossed her golden curls impatiently. "I have no time to waste here, Mrs. Rook; no time to listen to what is to me a very old and tedious story; and I want you to understand this, that if you don't leave me alone, cease to intrude upon me in this way, I'll have you arrested. Yes, madam, arrested."

"You will—eh?"

"Yes, I will!" Laura had gathered up her skirts, and was about to hurry off.

"Hold a bit!" Sarah Rook laid her hand heavily upon Laura's arm. "Since you talk about arrests I may as well tell you what you may expect in that line yourself."

"Me?"

"Yes, you, my pretty devil," answered Mrs. Rook. "Ah, you tremble now; the guilty are always in terror of the law; but, before I'm done with you, trembling will be a thing of the past so far as you are concerned."

Laura was sick with fright now, and while her breath came in hard gasps, her cheeks blanched with dread.

"Speak, tell me what—what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say."

"But you talk in riddles. I don't comprehend. I—"

"That's a pity—you don't understand. You who are usually so keen and sharp. Well, what if I were to say that I was once in Syskyou county, California, on a certain November night, in the Klamath mountain; that I heard a scream in a cabin, and saw a *murder committed*—"

"Hush, woman!" exclaimed Laura, leaping forward and placing her hand over the speaker's mouth. "Don't speak another word, or I'll—"

"Murder me in cold blood, as you did your husband!" rejoined the other.

"That's a lie! I did not do it in cold blood. If you were there, you know I did not. I loved him too dearly for that—idolized him; yes, he was my idol."

"And yet you destroyed him." This with irony.

"You needn't sneer. You never loved Gilbert Rock half so passionately, half so madly, as I did Cleve Robsart—as I do yet. 'Tis true I killed him, but he was mad with drink, and I only struck at him in self-defense. I did not expect to do what I did. I would have died sooner than have done what I did."

She was almost frantic as she spoke, and pale as death.

Sarah Rook was a trifle cowed, but she replied:

"Well, well, it don't matter what your intentions were; it is enough for you to know mine. To-night I leave for California."

"You do?"

"Yes, I do; and I go there for the purpose of having a warrant issued for your arrest. You needn't try to escape, for if you make one step in that direction, you will be immediately apprehended, and this old man, whom you have imposed on all these years, will then learn what a viper he has nurtured in his bosom."

Laura fell upon her knees, there among the wet leaves and grass, and, raising her hands imploringly, exclaimed:

"Oh, for God's sake! woman, have mercy—have mercy! I never injured you intentionally, and now I beg of you, for God's sake, to have pity on me—have pity on me!"

Sarah Rook shook off the hand that grasped her dress, and answered:

"I leave you now to gloat over your brilliant prospects; to enjoy pleasant dreams; to smile and blush and deceive, as is your wont. Good-by, Laura Robsart; when we meet again, it will be in the crowded court-room. Good-by."

She rushed off, and Laura fell forward on her face with a moan that echoed dismally among the trees.

CHAPTER XVI.

DID HE LOVE HER?

It was the last night of the Houstons at Newport. In the morning at eight o'clock they intended to start for Oak Manor, and John Nevin was to accompany them as far as New York.

Mabel had grown tired of the dissipation, and Alice, who stood by her side on the beach on this last evening, was half glad, half sorry, that the season was over. If she had suffered during the first few days, from the knowledge that John Nevin was enamored of Laura Robsart, his devotion since the departure of the beautiful widow more than made amends for the suffering of those days; and now, had John been going to Oak Manor in the morning, instead of to New York, she would have hailed the coming day with a gladsome heart. But, as it was, those two weeks of absence marred her pleasure not a little.

"I do wonder what is taking John to New York," she said.

"I don't know," Mabel answered. "He never told me, I'm sure."

Alice was silent a moment, then she spoke: "I wonder if Mrs. Robsart ever goes to New York?"

"Of course she does!" replied Mabel, "but

you needn't fear that he is going there on purpose to meet her."

"Why not?"

"Because, John would be manly enough to tell you, if he was; there is nothing of the sneak about John Nevin, and I know his passion for Laura Robsart is fading away every day."

"Did he tell you so?" eagerly.

"No; men are not so communicative as girls about such matters, but I can see it in his devotion to you. Besides, I don't think Laura gives him the slightest encouragement. I think she discovered, ere she went away, the relationship existing between you and him, and, bad as she is, heartless as she is represented, I don't think she would encourage his attentions after that."

The young ladies were interrupted at this juncture by the arrival of George Dalby, who proposed a sail.

"This is your last night with us," he urged, "and, as we may never meet again, why not have a parting sail?"

They consented.

"But, where is John? Let's have John with us," said Mabel.

"I left him writing letters," answered Dalby. "He ought to be through by this time, though."

"I will run and see," said Mabel, and she slipped off.

She found John Nevin in the reception-room, his hands crossed idly, and his gaze fixed upon a patch of blue sky, which showed through a rift in the drapery of the window, before which he sat.

"Well, John, we're going for a sail with George Dalby," said Mabel. "Will you come?"

"Certainly, Mabel; I'm much obliged for the invitation."

He leaped to his feet, and a letter fluttered to the floor. He stooped down, and picked it up hastily, but not before Mabel's quick eye caught the superscription; it was addressed to Laura Robsart, Sydenhottown, Maryland.

Mabel did not speak, but she felt very bitter toward John Nevin for the remainder of the evening.

Early on the following morning the trunks were packed, and, after an hour or so of bustle and worry, Newport was left far to the eastward.

George Dalby accompanied our friends to the depot, and, ere the train rattled off, he promised Mabel to visit her during the coming winter. When they reached New York, John Nevin parted with them.

"You must not waste your time here, in this big ugly city," cried Captain Houston. "We'll look for you in a fortnight, remember."

"In a fortnight," he replied, waving his hand gayly from the window of the Astor House coach.

Alice watched the vehicle until it was lost in the throngs; then she closed her eyes and wished these two weeks were past and gone.

One week after, John Nevin approached the clerk's desk at the Astor.

"Any letters?" he asked.

"The name, please?"

"Nevin—John Nevin."

"Yes, sir. Here you are—two."

One was a large, yellow-enveloped affair; the

other a white, square missive, scented with rose-leaves!

The handwriting was not familiar but the post-mark was Sydneytown, Maryland, and Laura Robsart's monogram was on the envelope.

He would not trust himself to read it there; its contents were too sacred—too precious, to be unveiled among the matter-of-fact crowd. And so he placed it in his breast-pocket and went up stairs to his room.

John Nevin was not what most persons would call a sentimental man; indeed, he enjoyed the reputation of being of an exceedingly practical turn; yet, when he found himself entirely alone, he took out her letter and kissed it.

Then he sat down, took out his penknife, and opened the envelope without spoiling the monogram. The aroma from the leaves, the straight legibility of the lines, struck him as being decidedly characteristic.

"Like herself," he muttered, "all neatness and sweetness."

Now he began to read. His cheek blanched at the first words, and he could scarce believe the evidence of his senses. The letter ran as follows:

"ROBSART PLACE, July 26, 18—.

"MR. JOHN NEVIN:

"SIR—Your kind favor of the 23d has just come to hand, and while I acknowledge that its contents flattered me, I must assure you that it has astonished and grieved me a great deal—more than I can write now. Believe me when I say that you were regarded by me as a friend—nothing more. I never loved but one man—Cleve Robsart—and since his death I have never for a moment thought of marrying again. From what has passed between us, it is better for both parties that we never meet again, and I trust you will avoid me in the future. Thanking you sincerely for your past friendship, believe me,

Yours,

"LAURA ROBSART."

He crushed the unoffending paper in his hand as he read the last sentence, and then let the cold words flutter down on the carpet.

"I could never have believed it of her," he cried. "Cold, unfeeling, treacherous. All these fine phrases of astonishment and regret are but the shallow coating to her deception. Avoid you, Laura Robsart! Yes, I trust fate will never suffer us to meet again. These lies, these words, have broken the spell, and I will not permit myself to suffer much."

He threw himself back upon the bed, and his moans belied his words. He was suffering, and keenly too; suffering from disappointment, from regret, from pique.

The next day he spent in wandering aimlessly about the city, and when night came it found him with a burning fever, caused, the physician informed him, by mental excitement.

"You have heard some bad news, or have been studying too much, and the chances are that you are going to have a very bad spell. Have you any friends in New York?"

"No, sir; but I have some a short distance up the Hudson."

"You had better go to them, directly," replied the doctor. "Country air and good nursing are necessary."

But John shook his head; he could not think of entailing so much trouble upon those who had tried so much to make him happy.

On the third day, however, he changed his mind. It was so hot, so sultry, so close in the city, and the hired nurse was so careless and unsympathetic.

"Yes, I'll go to the Manor," he said, in reply to the old doctor's query. "Telegraph Captain Houston of my condition and desire."

That same evening he was helped into a carriage to the boat.

CHAPTER XVII.

PREPARING FOR JOHN.

WHEN the telegram announcing the illness of John Nevin reached Oak Manor, it threw the family into an excitement which they had not experienced for many a day.

Alice helped her father to get ready to go to the city, while the servants prepared a room for the reception of the invalid, and Mabel sought for bouquets of fresh flowers in the garden. A sick room she thought ought never to be without flowers.

"It's so gloomy," she said, to Mrs. Houston, "and flowers are so bright; it is so stale, and flowers are so fresh; it has the smell of drugs, and bouquets are so delightfully aromatic."

When Alice paid her first visit to the scene of preparations, she found the soft muslin curtains drawn aside, flowers wreathed about the statue of Psyche on the mantel, and a bouquet on the little marble table at the head of the bed.

"Ain't it nice, and cool and inviting?" asked Mabel. "I'm sure he can't help but get well here."

Yes, Alice thought it very nice indeed; but the curtains needed just the slightest attention; they hung too limp, and were not quite full enough; Psyche ought to present a profile instead of a full front, and the moss basket which hung in the open window was too dry and ought to be sprinkled.

All this she remedied with her own hands, while Mabel smiled quietly, knowing all the time the necessity for this labor laid in the fact that Alice could not be happy, were other hands than her own to provide for the comfort of John Nevin.

When every thing had been arranged, Alice took a long survey of the apartment, and then it was locked up and the two girls went downstairs.

Mabel had received a letter from Joe Dormer that morning, and now she went off to the library to answer it, while Alice strolled into the garden to think and dream of John's coming.

Presently she grew tired of the landscape, and began to wonder if every thing in John's room was just as she had left it. The more she wondered the more anxious she became, and finally she determined to satisfy herself. There was no person in the hall or on the stairs as she groped her way back, in the uncertain twilight, and blushing red, stepped into the vacant chamber.

The delicate fragrance of the flowers Mabel had brought met her on the threshold, and the snowy curtains that drifted away from the windows and lay in folds upon the floor, were just as beautiful and neat as she could have wished them. Still, her fastidious taste, or her desire to be employed, I am not sure which,

whispered to her the propriety of looping up the curtains a trifle more, and of rearranging the pillows on the bed in the corner. This she did on tip-toe, gliding like a spirit of order and sympathy everywhere.

When all had been done, when there was not the slightest excuse for her remaining longer, she paused and looked regretfully about her. All at once a sudden desire to press her head on that pillow where his was to lay, took possession of her, and impulsively, as indeed she did everything, she fell upon her knees by the bedside, burying her face in the down and ruffles, and crying out:

"Oh, John, John Nevin, you can never know—never guess, how much—how dearly—I love you."

There was a tramping of heavy feet—a staggering, shuffling, heavy tread in the hall below, and Alice leaped to her feet and rushed out on the landing at the head of the wide stairs.

"Who is that—is that John?"

No one answered, but she saw her father leaning over a form that two of the hired-men were carrying, and then she caught sight of a pale face and drifts of black hair, which she knew too well.

Her first impulse was to rush down and kiss the sick man, but, on second thought, she grew scarlet at the bare idea of doing anything so unmaidenly, and so contented herself with crowding back into a corner to permit the men to pass with their burden.

Then she heard her father say that the journey had made him much worse. She could not go into John's room now; not while all those people were there, and stealing down-stairs unnoticed, she went off to the bluff overlooking the river.

There she sat down and cried; cried because John was worse; cried because society hedged in women so, and prevented her from telling him how much she loved him, how sorry she was that he was sick; and cried, too, that she was nothing but an ignorant girl, who could do naught but watch and wait for death or convalescence.

"Alice, dear, John wants you."

It was Mabel who spoke—kind, gentle Mabel—and Alice grasped her hand and asked, eagerly:

"Does he really want me, Mabel—did he ask for me?"

"Yes."

"Is there—is there anybody with him?"

This with some hesitation.

"No; not one."

Alice drew a long breath of relief and started for the house. When she reached the door of the sick room, however, she grew strangely timid. She stopped an instant and glanced in. The great round lamp of frosted glass, which depended from the ceiling, was turned down to a glimmer, making objects in the chamber appear very vague and indistinct, but there was light enough to show her where John Nevin lay with his face turned to the wall.

Quietly she tripped in, without making the faintest noise, and stood by the bedside.

"John!"

He turned quickly; his face looked whiter than marble in the dim light, and his eyes had a glassy glare in them.

"Alice—child!" he exclaimed, reaching out his feverish hand, and resting it upon her head.

She fell upon her knees.

"Oh, John, I'm so sorry you're sick."

There was something very honest in that assertion, and the quivering of the girl's voice thrilled John Nevin through and through.

"I knew you would be sorry, Alice, and believe me, I'm grateful," he answered.

"Oh, don't talk that way—of gratitude," she interrupted. "I don't want you to be grateful." Then, not knowing what else to say, she added: "Just please tell me, John, what you want—and don't ask anybody else for anything—will you?"

He promised he would not, and then a silence fell upon them. At length, John said:

"Alice, I think we had better change the programme; there may be danger in coming here, even."

"Danger?"

"Yes; this fever may be, probably is, contagious, and I'd sooner die than have you suffer as I am suffering now."

"And I would rather die, John, than leave you to suffer alone." She spoke calmly.

He reached out his hand and drew hers to him.

"God bless you, darling," he exclaimed, and then he kissed it passionately with his burning lips, while she bowed her head and cried secretly, for joy.

The next morning John was a great deal worse, and on the evening of the fifth day he was raving with delirium.

"It will be a hard matter to bring him around," said the attending physician.

"But, doctor, don't you think we had better have a consultation?" asked Captain Houston.

The grizzly old doctor smiled.

"As you please," he said; "I will bring Doctor Ahl with me, in the morning."

He bowed gravely, at the door, leaped on his horse, and was gone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN CALIFORNIA.

JOE and Adam Dormer sat in the office of the dry-goods house of Dormer & Co., in Sacramento, toward the close of an August day. It was a splendid establishment, filled with goods, some of the finest texture, others more useful than ornamental.

"Well, Joe," remarked Adam, "who'd have ever thought when we left Ruloville, that we'd ever have such a place as this?"

"I knew," exclaimed Joe, "if we had good luck, and that we have had, in abundance, that we couldn't be long kept down in this country, where brain and muscle are always recognized and liberally rewarded."

"True! true!" answered Adam, glancing admiringly at his handsome son; "but, Joe?"

"Well?"

"I was thinking it would be well enough to send for Mabel now. It's kinder lonely, here, by our two selves."

Yes, Joe acknowledged that, and he would like to have Mabel with them, better than anything else in the world; but then he thought it would be asking too much of a girl to make such a long sea-voyage alone; and besides, Mabel had a better home where she was.

"But you don't intend her to stay there all the time—do you?" asked Adam, a little impatiently.

"No; not all the time. For that matter, another year will do her," replied Joe. "Then I'll have a good start—twenty-five thousand, at least, and then—then I'll try to give her a pleasant home myself."

The old man was astonished at the younger man's confident tone, and after a moment he asked:

"Joe, you never asked her—did you?"

"No, never did."

"Then how do you know?"

"How do I know what?"

"That she'll have you?"

"Oh, I guessed," was the rather jocular reply.

"A package for Mr. Joseph Dormer, by Wells, Fargo & Co.'s express," said a clerk, putting his head in at the door.

"From San Francisco, Brown?"

"No, sir; from New York. Will I have the porter carry it back here, sir?"

"Yes—right away," replied Joe. Then, turning to his father, he said: "Ten to one 'tis from Mabel."

He was correct; it was from Mabel; for under the directions was written in a chirograph he knew well:

"For Joe, from Mabel."

It was a great flat package, and nimbly flew Joe

and Adam's fingers until the wrappings were all torn aside, and then Joe gave a shout of joy.

It was Mabel's picture, painted by George Dalby, almost life-size.

The eyes were blue, the skin soft and peachy-looking, the shoulders, which were bare, white as the baldrick of the skies, and skeins of golden hair seemed to float out from the well-shaped head.

"'Tis her image!" exclaimed Adam, wiping the tears from his eyes; "her very image!"

"Could not be more like her," responded Joe, all the sweet memories of the past stealing over him as he gazed.

"Seems as if I could run my fingers through her hair as I used to do," said Adam, after a while. To this Joe made no answer; he was kneeling on the floor before the counterfeit presentment, and was greedily devouring the face before him, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder. Looking up, he met the gaze of Cleve Standish, one of his best customers.

"Ah! Mr. Standish, that you?" said Joe, without moving, but reaching his hand.

"Yes; I myself," replied the tall, sun-browned, handsome man.

"When did you come down from Marysville, Mr. Standish?" asked Adam, rising and brushing the dust from his knees.

"This morning's boat," was the reply. "But what's Dormer, Jr., doing in that posture? Praying, eh?"

Cleve Standish was smiling as he spoke, and Joe smiled, too, as he said: "Yes, worshiping at the shrine of innocence and beauty. What do you think of *that* for a picture?"

He turned the portrait around, and Cleve Standish's eyes fell upon it.

There must have been something terrible in the painting, or in the gray light that fell upon it, for Cleve Standish's face became white as snow, and he staggered back a pace, clasping his hands in surprise.

"Who—who is this?" he managed to ask.

"Well," said Adam, not noticing the other's confusion, "that's the picture of our little Mabel."

"Mabel—Mabel Dormer? Did you say Mabel Dormer?"

"No, sir, I did not; seeing as I couldn't say so without telling a lie. Her name isn't Dormer, at all, sir."

"Then she is not your own?"

"No, not my own flesh and blood, but, God bless her pretty face! she's dearer to me than many a man's daughter to him."

"But her name!" exclaimed Standish.

"Is simply Mabel Lynn," answered Joe, turning from his earnest perusal of the portrait.

Cleve shut his eyes an instant, and to himself he repeated that name which had been dead to him for nineteen years. Then he said:

"This picture was taken a great many years ago, when she was quite young."

"Quite young?" repeated Joe; "why, Mr. Standish, what are you talking about? She is quite young yet—eighteen past, only. She don't look older, does she?"

"No, no, not older." Then Cleve Standish passed his hands over his eyes, and added: "Where did you become acquainted with this girl?—the original of the picture?"

Joe was a little taken aback by the abruptness of the query, but he answered, promptly.

"We were raised together. She was left at our house one night when she was but a baby."

"Who left her there—how did it come about?"

"Well, to tell you the truth—" Joe hesitated.

"Go on, Mr. Dormer. Do not think my manner or questions impertinent. I have a reason for asking them—a good and sufficient reason."

His words were very earnest and Joe continued: "Her mother left her there. She was going to Maryland, she said, to join her husband, and passing

through Ruloville, where we lived, asked permission to remain over night. Mother of course consented, and the next morning Mabel's mother was missing."

"Run away—eh? In the night, too?"

"Yes, walked off."

"And this woman—the girl's mother—called herself Mabel Lynn, did she?"

"Yes."

"But where is the young lady now?"

"At Captain Houston's, Oak Manor, on the Hudson."

"Ah! yes, Captain Houston. I knew him—that is, I met him in the West once."

Standish paused, and knitting his brows, looked down on the floor a moment, then he continued:

"Pardon me, my good friend. I've been very stupid and ugly, but I have learned something that may help to compensate me for a reckless, misspent youth. I will go home now, and rest a bit; to-morrow I'll come over and tell you the story of my life. It will repay you for the trouble I've given you, for it is a narrative full of fearful events."

"I'll be glad to have you come at any time, Cleve."

He thanked him, and was gone.

When Cleve Standish reached his lodgings, he threw himself into a large arm-chair and muttered:

"Yes, yes, it must be so—my child—and Mabel, she is not dead. I'll find her yet; I'll beg her pardon; I'll try and make amends to her for the past. Oh, the past, the bitter, bitter past!"

He covered his face with his hands, and, after a while, the tears trickled through his fingers and fell upon the carpet.

The next morning, at daylight, Cleve Standish left for Marysville, to fix up his affairs preparatory to an early return to the States.

On the third day he found a customer for his store, and the next saw him on his way to San Francisco.

It was Friday now; on Saturday evening the steamer would sail for New York, and Cleve Standish, who, a week before, never expected to see the Atlantic coast again, was feverishly eager to be off.

CHAPTER XIX.

HUNTING THE GAME DOWN.

TOWARD the close of a hazy September day, the steamer Golden Gate steamed into the harbor of San Francisco.

Among the passengers gathered on the deck were Sarah Rook and Samuel Blaize. These two stood a little apart, and while the remainder of the passengers indulged in all sorts of comments upon the surrounding objects—the scenery and the city—they were silent.

A half an hour after, Mrs. Rook and Sam stood upon the dock, amid a wilderness of bales and boxes, and a maelstrom of cries and shouts.

"Cab, sir?—Occidental Hotel. Cab, sir, for lady, sir?" The cabman addressed Blaize and the latter said, turning to his companion:

"The distance is not far, but mebbe we had better ride—for the sake of appearances."

"Yes, certainly," was the reply. "Give the man the baggage checks."

Sam did as requested, and then the driver opened the door of the shiny vehicle and handed Mrs. Rook in, while he and Blaize went in quest of the trunks.

They returned presently, and the Jehu mounted his box, cracked his whip and off they rattled.

Their mission was not referred to that night, but the next morning, after breakfast, Mrs. Rook said:

"Blaize, we had better have an attorney now to advise us. Do you know any person?"

"Let me see; I used to know an old fellow named Lambie, but mebbe he's dead afore this—most likely is."

"Is his office far from here?"

"No; on Washington street, five minutes' walk."

"Well, now, Mr. Blaize, I want you to call on Mr. Lambie at once, and tell him I would like to see him, this evening, if convenient."

Sam assented and departed. About noon he returned.

"I found him in the same old dingy den," he said, "sitting in the same chair in which I saw him last, and, I believe, with the same identical book in his hand. It's an odd conceit, but," with a smile, "blame me if I didn't think he's never stirred since that spring morning I left him last."

Mrs. Rook smiled, too, the first smile Sam had seen upon her face for many a long day.

That evening Mrs. Rook and Sam Blaize were in their private parlor, awaiting the entrance of Mr. Lambie.

The woman was becoming impatient, when a hasty, tripping tread was heard in the corridor, and the next moment an obsequious servant appeared at the door and presented a card on a silver salver.

"The gentleman wishes to see Mrs. Rook," said the servant, as the latter scanned the clumsy card on which was printed, in poor script, the name and profession of the person she was most anxious to see.

"Please tell him to walk up." The servant withdrew, and Mrs. Rook was about to resume her seat, when a dapper little man, of forty-five or thereabouts, with a pair of extremely large glasses on his nose, and very little hair on his head, entered.

After a profound bow from the little lawyer, and a slight inclination of the head, on the part of Mrs. Rook, Blaize came forward, and client and attorney passed through the awkward formula of an introduction.

When Mr. Lambie had been relieved of his hat by Sam, and had dropped into a chair, Mrs. Rook opened the conversation at once.

"Mr. Lambie, I wish to make it known to you, sir, that in this matter, about to be disclosed, I am not to figure."

The attorney put his tongue between his teeth, opened his mouth wide enough to expose a double row of teeth, and, although he did not utter a word, his manner said very plainly—"Certainly, madam, if it is your wish, certainly."

"I will see to it, however, that you are well paid for your trouble. And here," she said, rising and presenting him with two fifty-dollar notes, which she took from a tortoise-shell portemonnaie, "is a retaining fee."

"But, what does this matter involve?" asked Lambie, quietly pocketing the bills with a studied air of ease, as if such fees were picked up every day, and were not worthy of especial remark. "I trust there is nothing in it that could compromise the dignity of my profession."

"Nothing, sir," replied Mrs. Rook, penetrating the lawyer's mock scruples with her big black eyes. "I only ask you to vindicate the law, to have a malefactor brought to justice, to have a murderess punished."

The bland smile that was playing about the mouth of Mr. Lambie, faded away instantly, and there was surprise in his voice when he said:

"That's a grave charge, madam. I hope the evidence will bear it out. We must exercise both care and judgment, however, or we may overstep the mark."

"Exactly," rejoined Mrs. Rook; "but we must not be so chary of handling the matter, or the game, which we have now driven to cover, may escape, after all."

"Very true, madame, very true," was the response. "But the facts: what am I expected to do?"

"Mr. Blaize, there, witnessed a murder in 1855, in Syskyou county—the murder of a husband by his wife. The guilty one fled the country and escaped the hangman."

"Well, and now?"

"And now we have discovered her whereabouts. She is in Maryland, and I have a reason for wishing her brought to trial. This must be done by Mr.

Blaize and yourself, and I will pay all necessary expense, and give you a fair fee."

"I'm to understand, then, from all this, that I am retained for the Commonwealth, in the case of the Commonwealth *vs.*—"

"Laura Robsart."

"Ah, yes; Commonwealth *vs.* Laura Robsart. Evidence circumstantial or otherwise?"

"The evidence is positive," replied Mrs. Rock. "Mr. Blaize saw the deed perpetrated."

"Ah, indeed! Clear case, then. We must first go to Yreka, sue out a warrant, get a requisition from the Governor of the State, and bring defendant to this State for trial."

"I suppose that is what will have to be done."

"Yes, madam, that is the mode of procedure. Rather roundabout; going to cost something."

"I don't care for that. This woman *must* be brought to trial."

"Ah, yes; certainly she must. 'Twould be a great pity to let her roam at large. The community is not safe while she is outside of prison walls," ejaculated Lambie. "But when do you propose starting for Yreka?"

"To-morrow morning."

"No boat until evening," put in Blaize.

"Well, then, to-morrow evening," said Mrs. Rock.

"Very good," replied Lambie; "I'll be ready."

They shook hands.

"This must remain a secret for the present," she enjoined.

"You can rely on my discretion," was Mr. Lambie's reply.

CHAPTER XX.

IN DEEP WATERS.

WHEN Laura fell at the feet of Sarah Rook, on that night, when the two women met at Robsart Place, it will be remembered she uttered a sort of moan or wail. That moan reached the ear of Dr. Foster, who had sauntered into the garden after Laura, and he ran forward and picked her up.

He knew from the rigidity of her features, from the half-parted lips, from the wide-staring eyes, that she had fainted, and, stooping down, he bathed his hands in the dewy grass and pressed them on her forehead.

"Laura—Mrs. Robsart!" he exclaimed. "What has happened—what's wrong? Look up."

She sighed heavily, then her lips moved, and she said:

"I loved him—if I did kill him—I loved him."

These words shocked Dr. Foster terribly at first, but the next instant he smiled. "'Tis but the raving of an unconscious woman," he said. "No more to be relied on, nor a whit more accurate than a dream."

He said this quite loud, and Laura's quick ear caught it faintly.

"A dream!" she murmured. "a dream! Was it a dream? Only a horrible, fearful, terrible dream!"

"Yes," he replied, "only a dream."

"And I did not do it at all—my hands are free from blood-stains! He was my husband—he is not dead—I did not kill him!"

She stood up and glanced into Dr. Foster's face as she uttered this series of exclamations. He was now thoroughly frightened.

"Hush—sh! for God's sake, Mrs. Robsart. Somebody may overhear you."

She was in possession of her senses again. That "somebody may overhear you" served as an electric shock.

"Where is she?" she asked, pale as death.

"Who?"

"That woman—that terrible woman!"

"I saw no woman."

Laura paused an instant, passed her small white hand over her eyes, as if she would rub out the pain that lurked in them, and then, with a light laugh said:

"Oh, of course, there was no woman. I am such a little coward, and that nasty Clowes tells me such frightful stories, Doctor, and they work on my imagination so. The scream of a bird is sufficient to drive me into a fainting fit."

He saw through this shallow trick; she could not deceive him with her flimsy tales, but he felt it was best for both that he should appear, at least, to be blinded; therefore he said:

"Yes, I know how these stories act on persons of sensitive nerves. I have met such cases frequently in my practice."

There was a light of triumph in her eyes, as she replied:

"I dare say, although I was not aware that many were afflicted as I am. But, Doctor, I am really ashamed of my weakness," this with a laugh, "and I wouldn't have the folks at the house know it for the world."

"Be sure *they shall learn nothing* from me."

Nothing further was said until they reached the house.

She made an excuse to leave him for a few moments and hurried up-stairs to her chamber. Once there, she set about rearranging her toilet, which had suffered considerably from contact with the damp soil in the garden.

Bathing her face in cold water had the effect of removing all traces of tears, and the crimson flush that had burned in either cheek, while, without the aid of Rebecca, she managed to replace her soiled swiss with a light gauzy fabric, in which she appeared, if possible, more charming than ever.

She left her chamber by a side-door, stole along a corridor which led to a flight of stairs in the rear of the house, and then she found herself in the garden again.

The music came to her in fitful waves of melody; the night wind fanned her brow, and feigning a glad smile, she tripped up the broad stone steps and fluttered in among the guests again.

"Why, Laura, dear," said Mrs. Placide, "we were becoming actually dull without you."

"Yes," chimed in Miss Nannie Parry, "we would be lost without the music of your merry laugh."

Laura bowed, smiled, shook her head, as she replied:

"Pardon me if I have neglected my duty as hostess. I'm sure I would not be missed much where Miss Parry is; and really, it is so long since I have attempted the role of entertainer that I've lost all grace for the part."

Mrs. Placide proposed music, and Miss Parry began to sing.

It was an artistic performance, but the voice lacked certain elements, in the absence of which, vocalism can not charm the sensitive or educated ear.

Laura next took the stool. She rattled over a portion of "The Storm," from "William Tell," then dropped into a sweet, soothing English air, which drew a crowd about the piano, and calmed a half-dozen talking groups.

Miss Parry's performance had been unquestionably more artistic, but Laura's more sympathetic, and, withal, more pleasing.

Dr. Foster congratulated her on her success, and Mrs. Placide whispered into Miss Parry's ear:

"A sweet voice, but affected—very affected."

"Yes, very affected," replied Miss Parry, whose jealousy had been somewhat aroused by Dr. Foster's compliments and attentions to the heiress of Robsart Place.

It was midnight when the party separated, and the last to leave was Dr. Foster.

"You must call on us often," said Laura, as he bade her good-night.

"I shall be very happy to do so," was the reply.

"When will I find Mrs. Robsart at leisure?"

"Whenever it pleases Dr. Foster to call."

He pressed her hand, and leaping into the carriage rolled away.

CHAPTER XXI.

SUFFERING.

THE next evening Dr. Foster came over to Robsart Place, and met Laura on the colonnade.

"You are looking a trifle fatigued," he said, after the exchanges of a few commonplaces. "Dissipation, even in its mildest forms, does not seem to agree with you, Mrs. Robsart."

"No," she answered, "I'm not used to parties and company."

"I dare say; and yet, since the death of Mr. Robsart you've seen a great deal of pleasure, too."

She shook her head. "I've seen a great deal of sights; have traveled many miles; have been in Paris, London, Baden and Vienna; yet, after all, I have had but very little pleasure."

"Indeed! I should think that to a person of your impulsive temperament, and with your love of gaiety, the continent of Europe would afford a great deal of pleasure."

Again she shook her head. "The heart must be unclouded, Mr. Foster, before anything can be enjoyed."

"True, but your grief has had ample time to spend itself in eighteen years. Besides, when you were married to Cleve Robsart you could not have been much more than a child."

"I was sixteen in October—we were married in December; but, I think I was a woman—that is, there was nothing of the silliness of girlhood about me when I was married."

"And yet at times you appear very girlish, even now," he replied, with a smile. "I can hardly believe sometimes that you are Cleve Robsart's widow—or that Cleve, poor fellow, is dead, at all."

A shadow flitted into her face, and she asked eagerly:

"Then you knew my husband—Cleve Robsart, did you?"

"Very well; we were college chums at Yale, and many a day we romped around this place as boys do romp, you know."

"Yes, I know," she said, "and Cleve—he was older than you—eh?"

"Yes, three years; but I always looked older than I really was; while the reverse was the case with him."

Her eyes were sparkling as she rejoined:

"He was very handsome, and manly, Cleve was."

"Yes! I suppose you loved him at first sight."

"No; I don't believe in such things," she said, a little seriously; "I did admire him though, as soon as I set eyes upon him, and when he showed a preference for me over all the rest of the girls in Bloomington, why, I believe I worshiped him. You see I was an orphan, and had no one else to love."

"But you've had plenty of opportunities to love since, I venture to say, and it is almost a matter of wonder to me that you have not fallen a victim to a second passion."

She was pulling a blush rose to pieces as she answered.

"I have no desire to fill the vacancy in my heart that Cleve's death occasioned."

"And you will never marry again—you mean to say that?"

"Yes, sir," with great earnestness; "I mean to say, that I will never, never, marry again."

A silence fell upon them now; the last of the rose leaves fluttered to her feet, and he was beating his boots with his slender switch-like cane.

"You are an enigma," he said, finally.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"And why?" She was watching him closely.

"Because your manner and your words are so different."

"I don't understand you."

"When I say different, I mean that your manner would indicate that some one to love was a necessity with you: that your spiritual nature craved

love, admiration, attention, just as your animal nature craves food; but your words seem to belie this altogether. You are quite content to live on the memory of a past affection."

"Quite content," she replied.

"And yet, I presume, you and Cleve were not without your little difficulties too; you quarreled sometimes, didn't you?"

She answered with a gayety that was well assumed:

"Oh, yes; that is, we differed about trivial things, of course."

"Sometimes," he said, half-musingly, "those trivial affairs grew into great difficulties, where both are impetuous and fiery."

"Yes," she admitted.

"I have even known a case where a murder resulted from a quarrel too insignificant to speak of."

She darted a quick glance at him, her heart standing still for the nonce, but he was looking up at the sky, with a listless air, and did not notice either the pallor that overspread her cheek or the fire that blazed in her eyes.

"The master, Mr. Elton, is very sick, milady, and he wants you to come to him right away."

It was Rebecca who spoke, and Laura, glad of the interruption, said:

"I trust you will excuse me, Mr. Foster."

"Certainly, oh, certainly; if it's anything serious, send over for me. Good-by!"

He lifted his hat to her, bowed, placed his cane under his arm, and sauntered off.

She watched him from the hall door until he disappeared from sight in a clump of dense shrubbery, then she muttered half-aloud:

"What could he mean by a trivial quarrel, and a murder? Perhaps, after all, he is Sarah Rook's spy!"

The bare suggestion made her almost faint, and it was some time before she could gain sufficient strength to totter into the chamber where Elton Robsart was lying.

CHAPTER XXII.

FROM TIME TO ETERNITY.

PRICE was sitting at the head of the bed, fanning the old man, and Clowes at the foot, watching him.

Laura saw at a glance that he was very ill:

"This is very sudden, Price," exclaimed Laura.

"Yes ma'm, it's very sudden. He was complaining a bit after supper, and when I comes back here he was all of a heat, with pains in his back, ma'm."

Price resigned his seat, and Laura bent over the invalid like a ministering angel.

He opened his eyes languidly. "Is that you, Laura, pet?"

"Yes, papa; are you sick?"

He nodded his head, and the answer came back, feebly: "Yes, very—very."

She pressed her lips to his burning forehead, and answered, in his ear:

"Why didn't you send for me before! I was only out on the colonnade."

"I know, but I had Price and Clowes, and—and I thought you wanted to talk with the doctor."

"I'm sure I'd have come to you, no matter who was there," she said, with a pout, and he, thinking she was jealous of the servants, said, patting her bowed head gently:

"I know you would, darling. You are too kind, altogether too kind."

Again she kissed him, and turning to Clowes, said:

"What's best to be done now?"

"His limbs are a-cold, milady," answered the woman, "an' his head's a-burnin' up."

"Yes, I know—well?"

"Well, milady, in such a case a mustard-water foot-bath an' ice on the head is the proper thing."

"Yes! yes!" said Laura. "I have heard before of

such remedies. Here, Price, you get the foot-bath, and Clowes, dear, get the ice."

"We have no ice, ma'm," said Price, moving off, "unless somebody goes into town for it."

"To Sydneytown?"

"Yes, ma'm."

"Somebody must go for it then. We can't do without ice. Clowes, you had better get the bath, and let Price go to town."

"Yes, milady," replied the servant, "but, hadn't Price better bring the doctor as he's a-goin' that way? 'Twould be killin' two birds, you know, milady."

Laura hesitated an instant. She was afraid to have Doctor Foster prying about, and she dare not call old Doctor Peebles, in whom Elton had not the slightest confidence.

Price stood on the threshold, awaiting a reply.

"No; we won't have a doctor just now," she said, at last. "We'll try first what virtue lies in good nursing. If he is not better in the morning we'll have a physician."

"All right," and Price darted out.

After the bathing, and the application of ice to the burning temples Elton appeared to grow much better. The chills were less frequent, and he gave up all apprehension of cramps. His head, however, was very painful, and it was almost sunrise ere he dropped into an uneasy slumber.

Laura, who had never left the sick bed for an instant, fell into a doze, too, her head resting on the little stand at the window.

She had a troubled dream, about trials, and court-rooms, and stiff judges, disputing attorneys, mixed up with all of which was the calm, Sphinx-like countenance of Doctor Foster, who throughout, and under every circumstance, was acting the part of a spy upon her actions, and trying to obtain possession of her secret.

She awoke with a start and cry from a terrible situation, and beheld Doctor Foster standing by the bedside, talking to Elton.

"You have had an unpleasant dream, Mrs. Robsart," he said.

"Yes—terrible!"

"You should never sleep in that way. When your neck is strained, the pain of it causes you to dream of strangulation and such things."

She started. How knew he the import of her dreams? and why should she dream of strangulation?

Although these were the queries that were in her mind, they did not prevent her from smiling up into the doctor's face, and saying:

"I will be more careful in the future, thank you."

Then, turning to the invalid, she asked how he felt.

"Better—a trifle," was the faint response.

"What do you think of his case, doctor?" asked Laura in a low tone.

"To be candid, Mrs. Robsart, I fear the ole gentleman has his death on him."

She burst into tears, and fell upon her knees by the bedside.

Elton heard her crying, and in a whisper barely audible, said: "Don't cry, precious—don't cry for me!"

She did cry, however, for a whole hour, and indulged in violent fits of weeping during the rest of the day.

He was her best friend on earth; he had been indulgent, patient, self-denying, and now he was about to be taken away.

Only one thing afforded her anything like consolation, and that was the prospect of Elton's being dead and gone before Sarah Rook could carry out her threat of vengeance. Still, she had a hope that something would turn up to prevent Sarah Rook's return from California; that she would tire of the journey, or of the hard task she had marked out for herself, and that Elton's recovery would bring no woe either to her or him.

For the next fortnight the old man grew gradually

worse, and finally, on the thirteenth day of his illness, Doctor Foster standing close by his bedside in the darkened room, whispered into Laura's ear:

"He's going now, Laura—speak to him."

She bent over. "Papa! oh, papa, say something!"

His eyes were glazing, and his breath was coming in quick, short gasps; still, that voice reached his senses, and instinctively, he put his wasted hand in hers. "God bless you, Laura, my pet, my darling! You have been my guardian angel!"

Her tears fell faster than ever, and her sobs shook her whole frame.

"Put your face down, close, close to mine. There!" with an effort he pressed his lips to the round cheek.

"It's growing dark—let in the light—let in the light!"

On tip-toe Dr. Foster approached the window and drew back the curtains. The light flashed in, in a great flood of radiance, but the invalid saw it not; he was passing through the dark waters that girdle the earth about—going from time to eternity.

CHAPTER XX II.

A NEW LOVE.

JOHN NEVIN slowly recovered. He had been very close to the boundaries of another world; in fact, for a time, his life was despaired of, but, thanks to the tender nursing he received from Alice, a sound constitution, and the old physician's skill, he improved until everybody could see that the danger was past; and there only remained a little careful attention on his own part to make him what he once was.

As he grew better, however, Alice became shy and retiring—more like her old self, and never went to the sick chamber unless on an errand, and on such occasions remained no longer than was necessary for the completion of her task.

John noticed this. It was very tantalizing to him to have her come in, speak a word or two, and steal out again, as if she were afraid of, or did not care for him; but, it made him look for her coming more eagerly, and, I think, added not a little to his love for her.

But John kept his peace until he was able to leave his room; then he determined to settle the matter forever.

About this time, George Dalby came to Oak Manor, and Mabel and he were everlastingly intruding themselves upon John and Alice, at the very moment the former was thinking about words to express his thoughts.

The whole affair was very aggravating to a sensitive man who had long passed the period of brass and boyhood, and he was growing desperate when, one evening—a beautiful October evening—he found himself alone with Alice in the drawing-room.

The sky was still bright with the pale light of day, but the shadows were dense in the apartment where the lovers sat.

"It's getting quite dark," said Alice, interrupting one of John's stories of the old world. "Excuse me, but we had better have some light, had we not?"

He caught her dress as she was rising. "No, please; there is plenty of light. I prefer the dimness."

"Indeed."

"Yes; my eyes are not quite as strong as they used to be."

"Oh, very well. I thought you preferred the light."

"So I do," he replied; "but not at all times, and not every kind of light. There is a garish blaze that dazes the sight; it is very brilliant, but it is bad in its effect; it ruins the eye it delights."

She did not speak, and he continued:

"It is like a certain kind of beauty that intoxicates—makes one, as it were, drunk with passion, and we recover from its effects only to loathe it."

She knew why he spoke so earnestly, and this knowledge made her say: "And like liquor again, the inebriate often returns to the delicious poison. Disgust may only last while opportunity to indulge is lacking."

"But this shall not be so in my case," he said, abruptly. "I have tasted of the maddening bowl, but from henceforth, if you consent, dearest, I'll bask in a purer light."

She put up her hand deprecatingly.

"How do I know that this is not intoxication in a milder form? No, John, I will not permit you to fall into new meshes; you have suffered enough already."

"Then you do not love me—you do not respect—"

She interrupted him: "Yes, I do. I love and respect you; have done so for many a day; but, after all that has happened, I think it only right—and this, remember, is for your security as well as mine—that we do nothing rashly."

"Nothing rashly!"

He was astonished at the girl's wisdom.

"What I mean by doing nothing rashly is this: you have traveled a great deal—have seen many faces—have been charmed by one; whatever came between you, I know not; but this I do know, that you came here without any affection for me; your heart was wholly hers. You have been very ill; you are yet little better than an invalid: you doubtless feel grateful to me for my attention to you during your illness; this has moved you to speak."

She paused for a reply, and John answered:

"You are partly correct, Alice, but only partly so. I came here, 'tis true, ignorant of your worth, of your nobility of soul, of the inestimable goodness of your heart, but these I have learned to appreciate; and now, Alice Houston, I love you—with my whole heart and soul."

The tears were coursing down her cheeks as she said:

"And I have loved you this many a day."

His arms were about her; her head nestled for a moment upon his breast, then she continued, with an effort:

"John, I am not satisfied with this; I am not confident, as I should be, that I have your entire affection, and I therefore have a suggestion to offer."

"Speak out," he replied—"speak freely."

"I propose that, as soon as you are able, you will return to New York; then mingle with society, forget that we are anything to each other, and if, at the end of six months, you find that you really love me—and this is not the dream of an invalid—why then—"

He interrupted her.

"You will be my own little wife?"

"Yes."

"This, Alice, believe me, is an idle test—a romantic freak; but as you desire it, why then, of course, I consent."

She forgot, and I dare say he did, too, that they were on probation, for the next hour was spent in talking as only lovers can talk.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RECOGNITION.

CAPTAIN HOUSTON was sitting in his own room, quietly smoking a cigar and watching through the open casement the early autumn leaves rustle in great red showers to the earth, when a servant entered and announced the fact that there was a gentleman in the reception-room who desired a few moments' conversation with Mr. Houston.

"Well, go down and tell him that I will be there directly."

The servant withdrew, and Captain Houston glanced into the mirror over the mantel, re-arranged his necktie, gave a settling twist to his vest, and followed her.

In the reception-room he met Cleve Standish. The latter came forward to greet the old soldier, but he

stopped short when he saw there was no sign of recognition in the captain's face.

"I see you don't know me, captain?"

There was a moment's silence, and then Captain Houston said:

"Really, you have me at a disadvantage, but—"
He was looking under his eyebrows at him now.

"You were once in command of a body of troops at Peoria, and afterward at Leavenworth?"

"Yes, yes—over nineteen years ago."

"Do you not remember seeing in those places a wild, harum-scarum youth, named Cleve Robsart?"

"Cleve Robsart, who married pretty Mabel Lynn—the minister's daughter?"

"The very same."

"And you?"

"I am Cleve Robsart."

Captain Houston grabbed him by the hand.

"Ay! I remember now. You have changed a great deal, have grown stout, but I recognize you now."

"I thought you would," replied Cleve. "But captain, I have just returned from California, and I've come here to ask you a single question."

Captain Houston knew what was coming, but he restrained himself, and said:

"Go on."

"Have you ever seen Mabel Lynn since we left Leavenworth for California?"

His voice was full of eagerness.

"No, I never have."

"And you know nothing of her?"

"Nothing of herself—but her child—I know she is her child because she bears the same name, and is the very counterpart of your Mabel—is in this house now."

"I know that," replied Cleve; "at least, it was the knowledge of this circumstance that brought me back."

"Indeed! how came you to know this?"

"I met the Dormers in California—in Sacramento—and saw her picture there, and heard her name."

"Strange enough!"

"Very strange; but where is little Mabel? You know I never saw my child."

"Never saw her?" repeated the captain.

"No, never. Her mother and I were separated before the child was born. For years I have thought her mother dead."

"But how came you to be separated?"

"I am almost ashamed, captain, to tell you the story," began Cleve, blushing red. "You know how wild I was?"

"Yes."

"Well, when we got to the Pacific coast, I got in with a lot of gamblers and roughs, and what with drinking all day, and playing all night, in six months I was almost crazy."

"I know—go on."

"Mabel tried to win me away from my evil habits, used to lecture me on their sinfulness, and beg of me to return to the States. I would not listen to her; of course, her counsel made me, if anything, more desperate, and one night when possessed of a mania, I struck at her with a bowie-knife. She threw up her arms to ward off the blow, and, somehow or other, my hand received a twist, and the blade of my knife penetrated my own neck."

"My God!" exclaimed Captain Houston; "how terrible."

"Yes, you may guess how terrible, but you cannot even faintly imagine my feelings on returning to consciousness. There I lay in a cabin in the mountains, so weak from loss of blood that I was unable to speak, surrounded only by a party of rough miners, who had little or no sympathy for such a wretch as I." He sighed heavily.

"I learned, after awhile, that my wife was nowhere to be found, and the supposition was that she committed suicide by drowning herself in the Klammath."

"Fearful!" exclaimed the captain.

"Ah, it was, indeed, sir! but from that hour I resolved to lead a better life, and when I got well enough to be about again, I tramped all over the Pacific coast, sir, from San Diego to the Oregon line, in search of poor Mabel. Finally, I gave up the chase, and God knows how I mourned for my darling wife; night and day, sir, she was ever in my thoughts; yes, sir, night and day."

He paused a moment. "When I left Syskyou county, I changed my name to Standish, my mother's name, and have borne it ever since."

"But, you have some friends living—a father, have you not?"

"Yes; I have a father in Maryland; but he disinherited me years ago, and I'm not sure now whether he is dead or living."

He buried his face in his hands and something like a moan escaped him.

Captain Houston was touched by the misery before him, and going forward, he laid his hand upon his head.

"There, Robsart, don't take it so to heart. Your wife may still be living."

"Yes, I think she is living," he said, with animation. "You see, this child Mabel, whom the Dormers got from my Mabel in Pennsylvania, must have been born four months after her mother and I quarreled in California."

"Ah! indeed! Then she must be living yet. Yes! yes! You should advertise for her in the *Herald* or *Times*. Don't you think so?"

There was a merry peal of laughter in the parlor, across the hall, and the two men looked into each other's faces.

"It's she," said the captain—"it's Mabel."

Cleve Robsart made a quick step forward, as if he would rush in at once and repeat his whole story to the owner of that merry laugh, but the captain's hand was upon his arm, holding him fast.

"No, no, that won't do. You would frighten the poor child to death. I'll have to pave the way a little; step into this room, and I'll send for her."

"You'll not keep me waiting long?"

"No, no, but a moment."

Cleve stepped into a little room to the right; it was filled with books, and he saw at a glance it was a reading-room. Dropping into a chair, he listened eagerly.

CHAPTER XXV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

WHEN Captain Houston entered the drawing-room, he found Mabel and George Dalby, examining a lot of sketches which the latter had made during his stay at Newport.

"Will you excuse Mabel a moment, Mr. Dalby?"

"Oh, yes—certainly."

Mabel hastily laid down the sketch she was examining.

"Well, captain, do you want me?"

"Yes; I want to speak to you a few moments, in the reception-room."

He was looking very solemn, and for the nonce she thought him the bearer of ill-tidings.

"There is no bad news," she asked, following him, "is there? Nothing has happened Joe or Adam?"

"No, nothing. Sit down there, in this chair. There." He placed it so that Cleve could feast his eyes on her face. "I have good news for you, Mabel."

Her face lit up like a flash.

"Oh, captain, do tell me; is—~~is~~ Joe come back?"

He shook his head.

"No, it's not about Joe, or the Dormers, but about a nearer friend."

The girl began to tremble.

"I have heard to-day from your father!"

"My father!" she gasped. "My real father?"

"Yes, Mabel dear; but don't get excited. Keep cool, and I will tell you all."

"Oh, Captain Houston," and here the tears be-

gan to fall; "you are not trifling with me—you—you, are in earnest?"

"I am, most assuredly."

"And I have a father living after all?"

"Yes, Mabel, you have a father."

"And a mother, too! Oh, captain, pray do say I have a mother, too!"

"There, there; don't lose your reason, my good girl. Possibly your mother is still living, but your father certainly is, and is—"

"In this house?" she interrupted. "He is in this house! I know he is here!"

She leaped to her feet, and her eyes wandered about the room. Guided, as if by instinct, she rushed to the reading-room door. On the threshold she met Cleve Robsart.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, with outstretched arms.

She glanced up, heaved a deep sigh, uttered a little scream, and fell fainting on his breast.

"Look up, my darling, my own precious one, look up! 'Tis your father calls on you, your own poor half-crazed father."

He strained her to his bosom, in a passionate embrace, and kissed her parted lips, and cheek, and brow, while the hot tears fell upon her face in a shower.

"I feared I would never know this joy. My life has been so miserable, and bare—so very bare."

"Cleve—Mr. Robsart, she has fainted," said Mr. Houston, coming forward. "See, how pale she is."

Yes: she had fainted, but she was returning to consciousness again. He brushed the golden hair—so very like that other Mabel Lynn's—and held the glass of water, which the captain had brought, to her lips.

"Oh, I am only dreaming," she murmured, at length. "Only dreaming; I have no father—I'm all alone in the world."

"No, no, Mabel, my little Mabel," exclaimed Cleve; "you are wide awake and neither of us are alone in the world any more."

After a while Cleve told her the whole story he had previously related to Captain Houston, except that portion concerning the scene in the ranch on Klamath Mountain, which he deemed it fitting that she should never learn.

Captain Houston had slipped away, early in the interview, and they were now alone. They talked a long while together, and finally Mabel said:

"But is—of course your name is Lynn."

"No, that was your mother's name."

"And my name is not Lynn, after all?"

"No, darling, your name is Robsart."

"Robsart!" she repeated—a new intelligence breaking in upon her. "Robsart! Why, I knew a lady named Robsart, and everybody says she looks like me; and, oh, dear, it may be she is—"

"Your mother? Yes, darling, if she looks like you she may be." He was all eagerness now. "Where is she—where did you see her?"

"At Newport; but this woman was young and beautiful, and her husband was dead."

He did not mind this last remark.

"Where is she now?" he asked. "Who was she with?"

"She was with her husband's father, old Mr. Robsart, and I believe, yes, I'm quite sure, they live in Maryland."

Cleve Robsart felt himself grow weak and faintish. "Mabel, that lady is your mother. She is at Robsart Place now," he said. "The play is over at last; the clouds are breaking away, and the glad sunshine is coming. It is almost too much to hope for, but we will all be reunited again."

It was late when they parted for the night. Mabel had so much to tell him concerning Laura Robsart's stay at Newport; of her interview with her; of how she looked; of what she said; of her beauty, her manner, her voice, while he pictured her as she appeared to him when quite a child, when she won his admiration and affection.

The next morning all at Oak Manor knew that Mabel's father had—like Micawber's fortune—turned up at last, and there was a great deal of hand-shaking and congratulations over the event.

When, however, it became known that Laura Robsart was Mabel's mother, John Nevin felt shocked, and was incredulous for a time; but when Alice told him the whole story, word for word, as Mabel had given it to her, he was convinced.

He thought he could now see why it was that Laura Robsart had declined all offers of marriage, and from that moment he thought better of her.

"She had every opportunity to be untrue to her husband," he said to Alice, "but she resisted the temptation, and has come out of the fire—pure gold."

That same afternoon Cleve Robsart left Oak Manor for Maryland.

"I'll be back in a week," he said to Mabel, "and then I'll take you with me."

She watched him out of sight, and then went up to her chamber, and prayed that his mission might prove successful.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RUNNING AWAY.

ELTON ROBSART had been buried three days, and Laura was just recovering from the shock consequent on his sudden demise. She was very pale and exhausted, indeed, scarce able to be out of bed, but the terror with which Sarah Rook's threat filled her, nerved her to make one great effort to escape the toils.

"I can't stay here and wait for the avalanche to crush me. Every hour seems to fly, as if Time was hurrying my doom. No, no, I will go far, far from here, where that woman will never be able to find me."

She called Clowes and Price to the library, and, after they had dropped into the seats she pointed out to them, began:

"I'm going away," she said, abruptly; "this place is hateful to me. There is no reason why I should remain now that papa Robsart is dead."

Clowes nodded, and said: "No reason at all."

"And Price, my good man, I will intrust you with the care of this place; you will take care of it, and if I determine to sell, I'll do so through my attorney, and—and then you can rejoin me."

"Yes, ma'm," replied Price, complimented with the trust reposed in him. "Abroad, ma'm?"

"I don't know whether I'll go abroad or not just yet. I haven't made up my mind quite on that head. I'll keep you advised, however, and Clowes—"

"Yes, milady."

"You are to accompany me. But not at once, for I go to-night and alone."

"Alone, milady?"

"Yes, Clowes, I have a reason for going alone, and you must not question me, or tell anybody in the world that I'm going."

The servants exchanged glances, and Price answered:

"We will do whatever your ladyship asks us to do that's right and proper."

"Thank you; you shall not go unrewarded. Here is three months' salary in advance"—she handed each a roll of bills—"and to-morrow, or next day, you will discharge the servants and pay them out of the money you will find in my bureau drawer. Rebecca, whom we brought from England with us, must have her passage paid back if she wants to return to her native land."

"Yes, ma'm," said Price; "anything else?"

"Nothing. I leave at eight o'clock this evening, and, as it is now six, and I have some few preparations to make, the adieux may as well be spoken now."

Laura arose and shook hands with them both again and again, and then they left her.

When they had gone she glanced around the apartment, letting her gaze rest longingly, lovingly, on every familiar object.

"Robsart Place, you've been my home," she broke out. "When hunted down by the world; when foot-sore and weary; when I could find no rest anywhere, you welcomed me; and when terrors oppressed on all sides, you gave me rest. And now, old home, sweet, kind old friend"—she stretched out her arms as if she would embrace everything about her—"farewell!"

She set her teeth hard together, to prevent herself from wailing out the anguish that was in her heart, and began preparing for exile.

In her own room she shook out her many dresses slowly, folded them neatly, and, after wetting them all with tears, laid them away, as she thought, never to see them again.

Oh, the thoughts that were in her mind as she turned away at last. It was quite dark now; she had but an hour in which to reach Sydneytown, if she would be in time to catch the evening boat down the bay.

At first she thought of going up to Baltimore, thence to New York, and then to Europe, and perhaps even to Asia; but, she changed her route after a moment's reflection.

In case of pursuit, that would be the most likely route followed; it seemed the most natural, and there were lines of telegraph and sharp detectives at the depots in all those big cities who would find little difficulty in tracing a woman who traveled alone.

"No, I will go down the bay," she said, "to Norfolk, and I can take shipping from Wilmington or Charleston just as well."

She stole out in the garden by a side door, passed down the sloping hillside, keeping the hedge of sweetbrier between her and the house, until at length she reached the red oak.

Here she paused a moment for breath. Then she sped on faster than ever.

She had just reached a little willow copse on the outskirts of Robsart Place, when a heavy hand was laid upon her arm.

"Running away, eh?" cried a hoarse voice in her ear. "Trying to get off with your neck."

It was Sarah Rook's voice, and Sarah Rook's hand, the former full of triumph, the latter heavy, authoritative.

"Mrs. Rook!" gasped Laura.

"Yes, Mrs. Rook, indeed, lady beautiful, and in the nick of time, too."

Laura felt at first as if she must fall at the woman's feet, as she had done before, and beg for mercy but, remembering how vindictive, how flint-like, she had been on that former occasion, she determined to brave it out to the last.

"Let me pass," she cried, hoarsely. "If you don't it will be worse for you; mind what I say now."

She raised up her little blue-veined fist, like a Hercules in miniature, and Sarah Rook, astonished at this show of spirit, retreated a pace and suffered her to pass.

She had only gained a rod or two, however, when she was caught again; this time in a vise-like grip.

"You needn't try to scare me in that way. You are not going to get off. There is a guard at the boat-landing, and another at the Calvert House. I merely run ahead of the officers to have the pleasure of telling you that you have played your last antic—that my hour of triumph has come at last."

Laura glanced at the woman an instant like a lioness at bay; then, with a low cry, darted into the strip of dense timber, which stretched between the path she had been pursuing and the town, and was soon lost in the darkness.

Sarah Rook stood for a moment, as if spell-bound; and then taking off her bonnet and carrying it by the strings, started in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THEY MEET AGAIN.

ABOUT the same hour in which Laura quitted Robsart Place, Doctor Foster, sitting in his little office in Sydneytown, heard a loud tinkling of the night-bell.

"Wonder who this is?" he said, laying down the book he had been reading.

On opening the door he was confronted by a tall, dark, heavily bearded man, about whom there was an indistinct something strikingly familiar.

"Dr. Foster, I believe?" said the stranger.

"Yes, sir. Won't you step in?"

The stranger said he would, and did.

When he was seated in one of the doctor's easy-chairs, the light from the lamp on the table fell full upon his face and revealed the features of Cleve Robsart!

Dr. Foster took a seat opposite, and began a careful scrutiny of the face before him. This Cleve noticed, and while a smile played about his lips, he said:

"You say you are Dr. Foster?"

"Yes, sir," a little curtly.

"Sometimes called W. S. Foster, I presume?"

Cleve said this in a free and easy way that nettled the practitioner, who concluded at once that his visitor was a very impertinent fellow, and determined to make short work of him, he arose and said:

"Sometimes called one thing and sometimes another. But, what's your business, please?"

"Oh! my business. Certainly—my business is to find out whether you ever stood next in class at school, went out fishing with, or tumbled somersaults on the college green with a lazy, worthless vagabond named Cleveland Robsart, some odd thirty years ago?"

"Cleve, old boy!" cried the doctor.

"Winn, my dear, good fellow!"

The two men were locked in each other's arms, blubbering like boys.

After the first gush of welcome had subsided, Doctor Foster said:

"Why, how does this come, that you are walking beneath the glimpses of the moon again, making night hideous, and all that sort of stuff? I thought you were dead and buried these many years."

"Indeed! who told you so?"

"Well, common report at first, but afterward confirmed by your wife."

"My wife! where did you meet her?"

"At Robsart Place, to be sure!"

"How long has she been at Robsart Place?"

"Well, ever since your reputed death."

"There is a long story here, Winn, and I will tell it all, after you have answered me a few questions."

"Go on; I have long suspected there was a mystery or romance connected with your wife."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed! But I'm interrupting you. Go on."

Cleve paused a while, and then asked:

"What do you think of Mabel?"

"Mabel! Laura, you mean?"

"No, I mean Mabel; that is her right name. I never liked it, though, and I called her Laura in sport, and she came finally to adopt it. What do you think of her, I say?"

"That she is beautiful as a picture."

"I don't mean that. How has she acted since her arrival here?"

"Well, as for that I can't say," replied Doctor Foster. "I have been away a great deal; but this I can say, that she has the reputation of being an angel, and since I have known her she has well deserved this title. Your poor father doted upon her and she upon him; in his last illness she never left his bedside."

"His last illness," repeated Cleve. "Can it be that he is dead?"

Doctor Foster told him, then and there, the whole story of Elton's last hours.

He was pained when he learned of his father's death, and a silence fell upon the two, which was at length broken by Cleve, who said:

"And so she refused to marry again, and declared her love for me?"

"Yes."

Here the conversation was interrupted by a quick double rap at the front door.

"It's a call, I presume," said the doctor. "Here, Cleve, step into this room. I'll not keep you waiting long."

Cleve passed into a room in the rear, and closed the door after him.

He had scarcely done so when, without waiting for the doctor, the street door was flung open, and Laura burst into the apartment panting, flushed, excited.

"Oh, doctor," she broke out, "don't give me up—do not let them take me! I have come here to throw myself upon your mercy. Oh, don't let them take me away! Hide me! have pity!"

She held him fast by the arm, and looked appealingly up into his face.

"Be calm," he said, "be calm, and pray tell me what's wrong with you—what's happened?"

"They've come for me, Sarah Rook and the rest," she answered, hurriedly, "and they're going to take me back to California and hang me!"

"Hang you, Mrs. Robsart?" Doctor Foster ejaculated. "You are surely demented. Why should they hang you?"

"They accuse me of killing my husband, Cleve Robsart. I thought you knew."

"No, I *don't* know," he said, very calmly, "that you did any such thing."

"Then you are not in league with my enemies?"

"No; be calm; sit down. No one shall harm you. You say they charge you with killing your husband?"

"Yes; but it was accidental, doctor; I was trying to save my life; I would sooner have killed myself, for I loved, do still love, my poor dead husband."

She was wringing her hands now.

"Be still, please," he said, laying his hand upon her head; "I have news for you—*good* news! *Your husband is not dead!*"

"Not dead?" she repeated, incredulously. "Oh, yes, he's dead; I saw him lying stiff, dead!"

"You thought you did, rather," replied the doctor. "But he recovered. I heard from him to-day; he is alive and well, and is coming here soon to see you!"

She leaped to her feet.

"You are not jesting doctor? you *have* heard from him?"

"Yes, I have heard from him; but you must be calm now; excitements are dangerous."

"I am calm," she cried, excitedly—"very calm; and now tell me how you came to hear from him. You see, there is not the slightest danger; I'm not excited at all."

"Yes; but you are excited," he said, "and I'll not speak a word more until you sit down. There now that's better."

She had dropped into a chair.

"You thought your husband was killed of course, and you ran away?"

"Yes; I was quite sure, and I took to the mountains for my life. I left him for dead."

"It takes a great deal to kill some persons," he went on. "and your husband seems to be one of these. Would you like to see him?"

"Who—my husband?"

"Yes, Cleve Robsart."

"He is here!" she exclaimed, rising. "I know he is here; something tells me he is here. Oh, doctor, let me see him but for one moment, and I will die content."

The physician put up his hand to command si-

lence. She took no notice whatever of the movement, but cried out, with all her force:

"Cleve Robsart!—Cleve, my husband! Why don't you come to me?"

There was a shuffling of feet; the door of the back office flew wide open, and with a scream of recognition, she fell forward, fainting in her husband's arms.

He smoothed back the drifts of golden hair, and kissed her brow and cheek rapturously.

"Again!—again!—again!" was all he could say, and his hot tears fell on her upturned face.

"Take her into the back room, Cleve," said Doctor Foster, considerably. "I presume you two will have a great deal to say that will not be especially interesting to third parties."

Cleve thanked him, and half led, half carried his beautiful but still unconscious wife into the apartment designated.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOILED.

WHEN the door had been closed behind the reunited pair, the physician sat down, drew a long breath, and exclaimed:

"Well! well! well! This beats the most exciting of Ainsworth's fictions, and is fully equal to a French play. First, an old friend; then a mystery; and then, 'Oh, heaven and earth, but this is wondrous strange,' a long-lost wife, reconciliation, and, if we had a little red fire—what an effective tableau!"

While he was thus soliloquizing, the front door was unceremoniously opened, and in stalked three men. The first was our old friend, Sam Blaize.

"I say," he blurted out, approaching Doctor Foster, who had arisen to his feet, "where is she—the woman?"

"If you mean Mrs. Robsart," the doctor said, but Blaize interrupted him.

"Yes, we mean Mrs. Robsart, and you know it, too. We don't want no shilly-shallying about it, either; we come after the woman a long way, and now we want her."

"And what for, pray?"

One of the two men who had entered with Blaize, and had been silent up to this time, came forward now and said, in a respectful manner:

"Pardon, sir; but there's no need of any hard words. We're officers of the law; we've come here to do our duty; our simple duty, sir, and it will be better for all parties to have no trouble."

"I understand that, perfectly," answered the doctor; "and I'm sure I have no disposition to interfere with you in the discharge of your duty."

The officer nodded complacently, and the other went on to say: "You are in search of Mrs. Laura Robsart, whom *somebody* charges with killing her husband?"

"I'm that somebody," interrupted Blaize, again.

"You saw the murdered man, I suppose?"

"Saw him! I saw *her* do it!"

"Indeed!" Then, after some hesitation—"You knew the murdered man?"

"Well."

"You could identify him easily?"

"I never forget a face."

"You will have an opportunity of testing your memory in a moment."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean simply this—Cleve Robsart was not killed—neither by his wife nor any one else."

"Oh, my friend, that won't do," said the officer, with a grin; "that's too thin; it won't work."

"But, I'm prepared to prove my words good," replied the Doctor. Then, going to the door of the inner room, he rapped gently, and called out: "Cleve! Cleve! Come here, I want you—alone, if you please."

The next instant Sam Blaize was startled by the

appearance of one whom he would have taken his oath a moment before had been dead for many a year.

"Are you Cleve Robsart," gasped Blaize, "of Syskyou county?"

"Yes, as sure as you are Texas, of Klamath Bar," was the reply.

Blaize was dumfounded.

"Well," said the officer, "is this your murdered man?" turning to Blaize.

"Yes, I think so. I'm quite sure it is," he said, in answer. "But I saw him fall and the blood spurt out of his neck. I'm positive of that."

"And there is the mark yet," said Cleve, pulling aside his beard and disclosing a red scar.

"Yes! yes!" said Blaize.

"So, you're the man supposed to have been dead—eh?" and the officer addressed Cleve.

"Yes, sir; I'm the man!"

"Well, there seems to have been a pretty mess made of this business, anyway. But however, you are not to blame, and to be candid, I'm glad the dead man's alive. Come on," he said, speaking to his companion.

The door opened and closed, and the two policemen and Blaize trotted down the street together.

In the little parlor of the Calvert House, Sarah Rook encountered the trio. "You've come back soon. Where is she? Where is your prisoner?" she demanded.

"Ain't got any prisoner," returned one of the officers. "The man's alive and well; we've just had a mighty interesting talk with him."

"Why, yes, of course," put in Blaize. "You see Cleve Robsart recovered from the wound he got that night, and he is now in this town!"

"In this town?" she repeated.

"In this very town. I saw him but a moment since."

She saw it all then; it broke upon her like a bright light, all at once, and she muttered: "I have been made a fool and dupe of, and I am not avenged after all. I am to be laughed at, jeered at! Oh, this is too much, it's driving me mad."

"But, Mrs. Rook," ventured Blaize, timidly.

"Go away!" she exclaimed. "You are a fool and a knave. You have aided my enemies to drive me mad. Go away, I say—go away!"

She almost shrieked the last words, and Blaize and the two officers withdrew.

That night Sam left Sydnevtown forever, and the next morning old Calvert Pittock found Sarah Rook lying on the floor of his best chamber—dead.

She died from heart disease, the doctors said, and perhaps she did.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE END.

The next morning, bright and early, Cleve Robsart and his wife, whom he still called Laura, started for Oak Manor, and on the second day, as the boat which carried them up the Hudson neared the landing, Cleve whispered to the beautiful, happy woman by his side:

"Are you not getting anxious to see our daughter—our Mabel?"

"Yes, very; but—"

"But what?"

"It all appears so strange, and I fear she will not love me at first—like—like a daughter."

"Yes, she will," he replied. "Mabel is all love and gentleness, and I've told her the whole story, justifying you fully."

"You are so good, Cleve."

The boat touched the shore, and while Price and Clowes looked after the few trunks they had brought with them, Cleve and Laura walked up the steep roadway toward the house.

On the lawn they met Captain Houston and his wife.

He gave Laura a warm reception, as, indeed his, wife did, as well, and when the bustle of hand-shaking was over, Laura asked:

"And where is Mabel?"

"In the drawing-room," answered Mrs. Houston. "Will I call her?"

"Oh, no, please," said Laura, growing excited.

"Let me go alone; I want to meet her all alone."

She picked up the skirts of her traveling-dress as she spoke, and hurried up the walk.

Mabel was seated on a divan, by one of the windows, reading a letter just received from Joe Dormer, telling her that he would be in New York in two weeks, and that she might expect him at Oak Manor immediately after his arrival.

She kissed the missive over and over, and then settled herself to read it through again.

Laura watched her a moment through a chink in the doorway; then, pushing the door back softly, she glided into the large, splendidly furnished apartment.

"Mabel!" she exclaimed, and then she screamed as if a knife was piercing her heart.

"My mother!" shrieked Mabel.

Possibly there never was such a meeting before, such kissing, such crying, such clasping of forms.

Two weeks after that day there was another arrival at Oak Manor: Joe Dormer returned from California.

I will not attempt to describe the scene that followed; I could not paint Mabel's surprise and joy to find her old boy lover in the dark, handsome, stylish young merchant, nor the pleasure he experienced to find her even more winsome than of old, and a thousand times more beautiful than Dalby had painted her.

Of course he was astonished at the new role he found Cleve playing, and he could just remember that Laura bore a striking resemblance to the woman whom he met when quite a boy at his own fire-side in Ruloville.

At first Laura wanted to return immediately to Robsart Place, but Alice and John Nevin coaxed them to remain another week.

"We are to be married, on Thursday evening, you know," she said to Mabel, "quietly at home, and we want you all to be present. There will be no strangers."

They remained, and when Thursday evening came round, a marriage ceremony was performed in the drawing-room at Oak Manor, and Miss Alice Houston became the wife of John Nevin.

The next morning, the newly-wedded pair started for a tour of Europe.

Robsart Place was decked in snow-wreaths, and the Christmas bells were ringing right merrily from the steeples of the two faded churches in Sydneytown, when Joe Dormer wed Mabel Robsart. The ceremony, as in the former case, was performed in the drawing-room.

As might be expected, Mabel looked charmingly, and when Joe caught a glimpse of her, as she came modestly in, leaning on the arm of her father, he could scarcely keep back an exclamation of wonder.

The ceremony over, the happy pair, accompanied by Laura and Cleve, set out for California, and in due season they startled Adam almost out of his wits by walking into the back office where he was busy at work.

After the first shock had subsided, and after Adam had cried over Mabel a while, he said, gayly:

"And you wasn't afraid to come back with Joe?"

"No, not a bit," she added. "Stoop down; I want to tell you something."

He did so.

"I'm Joe's wife!"

The prompter may as well ring down the curtain.

THE END.

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